Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D. D.

Year: 1959	*SERMON TITLE*	*TEXT*
January 18	"The Beginning Of Miracles"	John 2: 11
February 1	"Thorn In The Flesh"	II Corinth. 12: 7
February 8	"From God's Outstretched Hand"	Luke 18: 41
February 15	"A Study In Temptation"	Matthew 4: 1-11
February 22	"A Study In Faith"	Matthew 14: 21
February 25	"Last Come, First Served"	Matthew 20: 16
March 1	"A Study In Conviction"	Luke 11: 27-28
March 15	"A Study In Sinlessness"	John 8: 56
March 22	"Thoughts On A Palm Sunday"	Matthew 21: 10
March 29	"Thoughts On An Easter Day"	John 20: 16
April 12	"In His Steps"	I Peter 2: 21
April 19	"The Christian And Suffering"	I Peter 2: 20
April 26	"The Mature Christian"	John 16: 12
May 3	"Ours For The Asking"	John 16: 23
May 10	"Fervent Charity"	I Peter 4: 8
May 17	"Lessons From Pentecost"	Acts 2: 1
May 17	"Pleasing God"	Psalm 19: 14
May 31	"God Is Love"	I John 4: 16
June 7	"The Dividing Line"	I John 3: 14
June 21	"As Your Father"	Luke 6: 36

1959- continued	*SERMON TITLE*	*TEXT*
June 28	"Nevertheless"	Luke 5: 5
July 5	"G God Bless America"	Psalm 67: 1-2
August 9		Luke 18: 14
August 16	"When Life Turns Robber"	Judges 18: 24
August 23	"Eyes That See"	Luke 10: 23
August 30	"On Imitating Christ"	Galatians 5: 22
September 6	"Mouthpiece For The Lord"	I Kings 17: 16
September 13	"Whom God Reproves"	Job 5: 17
September 20	"A Word Fitly Spoken"	Proverbs 25: 11
September 27	"A Wise Choice"	II Corinth. 1: 11-12
October 11	"God's Open Hand"	Psalm 145: 15-16
October 18	"In The Tradition Of Saint Luke"	Luke 10: 9
October 25	"Through Faith In Jesus Christ"	Romans 3: 22
November 1	"Three Marks Of A Saint"	Revelation 7: 9
November 8	"Our Response To God's Challenge"	John 6: 5-6
November 15	"The Brevity And The Misery Of Life"	Job 14: 1
November 22	"The God Who Comes, Saves"	Isaiah 35: 4
November 26	"The Grateful Heart"	Ephesians 5: 30
November 29	"The God Who Forgets"	Jeremiah 31: 34
December 6	"The God Who Should Be Feared"	Malachi 4: 2
December 13	"The God Who Comforts"	Isaiah 40: 1
December 20	"The Unrecognized God"	John 1: 26

SERMONS - 1959
PASTOR SHAHEEN

SAINT LUKE LUTHERAN CHURCH
SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND

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January 18, 1959	"THE BEGINNING OF MIRACLES"	John 2:11
February 1, 1959	"THORN IN THE FLESH"	II Cor. 12:7
February 8, 1959	"FROM GOD"S OUTSTRETCHED HAND"	Luke 18:41
February 15, 1959	"A STUDY IN TEMPTATION"	Matt. 4:1-11
February 22, 1959	"A STUDY IN FAITH"	Matt. 14:21
February 25, 1959	"LAST COME, FIRST SERVED"	Matt. 20:16
March 1, 1959	"A STUDY IN CONVICTION"	Luke 11:27-28
March 15, 1959	"A STUDY IN SINLESSNESS"	John 8:56
March 22, 1959	"THOUGHTS ON A PALM SUNDAY"	Matt. 21:10
March 29, 1959	"THOUGHTS ON AN EASTER DAY"	John 20:16
April 12, 1959	"IN HIS STEPS"	I Peter 2:21
April 19, 1959	"THE CHRISTIAN AND SUFFERING"	I Peter 2:20
April 26, 1959	"THE MATURE CHRISTIAN"	John 16:12
May 3, 1959	"OURS FOR THE ASKING"	John 16:23
May 10, 1959	"FERVENT CHARITY"	I Peter 4:8
May 17, 1959	"LESSONS FROM PENTECOST"	Acts 2:1
May 17, 1959	"PLEASING GOD" (Service of Confirmation)	Psalm 19:14
May 31, 1959	"GOD IS LOVE"	I John 4:16
May 7, 1959	"THE DIVIDING LINE"	I John 3:14
June 21, 1959	"AS YOUR FATHER"	Luke 6:36
June 28, 1959	"NEVERTHELESS"	Luke 5:5
July 5, 1959	"GOD BLESS AMERICA"	Psalm 67:1-2

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August 9, 1959		Luke 18:14
August 16, 1959	"WHEN LIFE TURNS ROBBER"	Judges 18:24
August 23, 1959	"EYES THAT SEE"	Luke 10:23
August 30, 1959	"ON IMITATING CHRIST"	Gal. 5:22
September 6, 1959	"MOUTHPIECE FOR THE LORD"	I Kings 17:16
September 13, 1959	"WHOM GOD REPROVES"	Job 5:17
September 20, 1959	"A WORD FITLY SPOKEN"	Prov. 25:11
September 27, 1959	"A WISE CHOICE"	II Chron. 1:11-12
October 11, 1959	"GOD'S OPEN HAND"	Psalm 145:15-16
October 18, 1959	"IN THE TRADITION OF SAINT LUKE"	Luke 10:9
October 25, 1959	"THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST" (Reformation Sunday)	Romans 3:22
November 1, 1959	"THREE MARKS OF A SAINT" (All Saints' Day)	Rev. 7:9
November 8, 1959	"OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S CHALLENGE"	John 6:5-6
November 15, 1959	"THE BREVITY AND THE MISERY OF LIFE"	Job 14:1
November 22, 1959	"THE GOD WHO COMES, SAVES"	Isaiah 35:4
November 26, 1959	"THE GRATEFUL HEART" (Thanksgiving Day)	Eph. 5:30
November 29, 1959	"THE GOD WHO FORGETS"	Jer. 31:34
December 6, 1959	"THE GOD WHO SHOULD BE FEARED"	Malachi 4:2
December 13, 1959	"THE GOD WHO COMFORTS"	Isaiah 40:1
December 20, 1959	"THE UNRECOGNIZED GOD"	John 1:26

1/11/59

The sermon is entitled "The Beginning of Miracles." The text is the 11th verse of the second chapter of the gospel according to John: "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him." (see text)

At one time or another after twenty years of preaching, the preacher may come back to a text that he has used before. That is not the case this morning. Year after year when the Second Sunday after the Epiphany has come around, this passage of scripture with which I have not dealt looms before one. I will tell you why I have not preached on it before.

Whenever I came to study it, it seemed to pose far more difficulties for me than I was willing to handle. Maybe that is why I have kept my distance from it. This year I am intrigued by the fact that I have never preached on this passage before. I make bold to deal with it right now, and I shall frankly admit that at once I shall outline for you the difficulties--the things I cannot explain--the things I cannot understand. In doing so, perchance I will give you a rule of thumb that you may want to follow when you study a passage of scripture which is not readily made plain to you.

Now these are the things that I cannot easily understand about this miracle: I cannot understand, as an example, why, if this was the first miracle that Jesus performed, why John should be the only one to record it. If it was the first miracle and all the other disciples present when it happened, why didn't it register with Matthew? First things have a way of making an impression. Some of us have a way of remembering first words--first things that we saw--first things that we might have done at one particular time or another.

And then I found it difficult to understand why, if our Lord was going to set his miracles into motion, why of all things should he choose this kind of miracle to be the first? A miracle where a blind man is made

to see--a miracle where a deaf man is made to hear--a miracle where the hungry are fed--a miracle where a man who is dead is brought back to life--why not begin with one of these? Why begin with a miracle like this, where vessels of water are changed into wine? What is the ethical foundation for such an act? What earthly good could come from it? This I cannot understand. Also I cannot understand, when I have gone to this page on previous occasions, how the performance of a miracle of this particular kind could manifest his glory. What does the changing of water into wine have to do with showing forth God's glory?

Now here is another thing that puzzles me--the reference to the fact that his disciples believed on him. What about the multitudes? Why doesn't the writer say "and all the people present were astounded?" Why refer to only a handful of men? At first blush, when I would come to this passage of scripture, I would be overcome by these difficulties and very easily go to some other passage and thus prefer it. Now, of course, I have violated a rule for studying the scriptures--no single page should ever be turned quickly just because there are some things on it which were not made plain at once. Rather, we should deal with that page of scripture for whatever we can find that is obvious and cling rather tenaciously to it. This page, contrary to any notion that we may be quick to hold, is filled with a number of things that are quite obvious. Let us look at them together.

In the first place, it is significantly helpful that Jesus Christ was present at all on this occasion. It means a great deal to me to realize that when Jesus Christ came to earth he was willing to identify himself with human nature. This God of ours is not content to be in a solitary place. He will not build for himself some ivory tower and let the rest of the world go by. This God of ours is not content to take a balcony approach in life. He prefers to be down in the road, in the midst and thick of life. The whole fact of the incarnation is evident here-God in the flesh, coming

to man where man is-this is no absentee Lord--this Jesus Christ.

Now this, too, I can understand, that when a problem arises and Jesus Christ is present--he is willing to become involved, he will endeavor to become part of the answer to the problem. Let me give you a little bit of a setting for this miracle. There is no celebration in the Near East like a wedding celebration. It is the gala event in the lifetime of a bride. It is the social event, it is the social occasion of the community, and the celebrations seem to go on endlessly--three days-five days--seven days--and always merriment, and the host who is equal to the occasion spreads as fine a table as he can.

The word comes to Jesus Christ that the refreshments for the occasion are running short. This is the problem. Jesus Christ is made aware of the problem and he endeavors to help answer the problem. It is a concern of his, not just a gentleman-like concern. After all, he was a guest, and maybe he and the disciples came a little bit late and they were among the unexpected ones. Maybe he himself considers himself part of the problem, and so he is willing to assume a responsibility, and there in the Near East he accepts a fact as it is. Wine is part of the merriment. In fact, the Hebrews have a saying that there can be no joy without wine, and this was a happy occasion. If this bride, on her wedding celebration, should have guests coming who could not be cared for, she would be embarrassed as long as she lived. They would never forget it, nor would she.

Now whatever you may think of this particular problem, a problem it was, and Jesus Christ endeavors to help solve the problem. Now that, to me, is significant. Whenever Jesus Christ comes into a situation and there is a problem, Jesus Christ makes himself available in the attempt to get the answer. I think when he endeavored to solve this problem, he did it out of tenderness and out of love. He had a feeling for this bride in this predicament. Now that says something to me--that when Jesus Christ performs a miracle

performs a miracle, and a miracle this was, he performs it, not because there is to be a display of God's power--granted that that may be true. But it is far better to understand it as I would understand it with you now. A miracle once performed by Jesus Christ is meant to be a display of his love and his concern--a disposition on his part to act specifically, We may call it supernatural, but a disposition on God's part to act specifically for no other reason except that he is propelled into action because of love and concern.

It is significant with me, when I come to deal with this miracle, to recognize the fact that this comment was made, "The best has been kept until the last". Jesus Christ added something to the occasion , and what he added made the last hour far more attractive, far more stimulating, than the first. I like to think that that is the meaning of Jesus Christ in any situation, that once Jesus Christ comes into a person's life or into the midst of a situation, the last stage is always better than the first. Something with Jesus Christ is better than something without Jesus Christ. I have always been grateful for the fact that it has been an easy thing for me to respect age--not a difficult thing at all. Rather unashamedly I tell you there is something unusually attractive for me in people who have lived longer than I, who have had experience, in whom maturation has set in in no uncertain way, and while that is true for age in itself, it is especially true for me when I come to deal with people who have had a Christian experience that is older than mine, for I think theirs is ever so much better than mine. For the longer a man knows Jesus Christ, the longer he is dealing with Jesus Christ, the better he becomes, the brighter and more wonderful the situation. And I would say to you with all my soul, if your life is not enhanced today more so than a year ago--having had experience with Jesus Christ--then there is something wrong with your experience of Jesus Christ. As one grows older with Jesus Christ, he can honest-

ly say "This last hour is better than the first."

Now when I come to deal with this miracle, I am content to level off in this way: that Jesus Christ at one time came to people where they were, and having been made aware of their problem, endeavored to help them solve it. Whatever he did, he did because he loved them and had a vital concern for them. Can it be said that for most of us the crying need is to have someone to pay attention to us--no matter how indifferent you may want to be, let me show you my concern for your problem. This miracle reminds me of what Jesus Christ does when he comes into people's lives. I am willing to accept this miracle as I think the writer of the fourth gospel must have accepted it--as a token--as a sign. As a beginning of miracles we have here something which is to be typical of the whole life of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ comes to my life where I am, meets my need--and whenever and however this happens, you have a miracle. When it happens, I see the glory of God and the face and power of Jesus Christ. What Jesus Christ adds to my life is that something which makes all the difference in the world.

This is most certainly true.

The sermon, based upon the epistle for the day, is entitled "Thorn In The Flesh." The text is the seventh verse of the twelfth chapter of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians: "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."

Come now, tell me, will you, what do you think was Paul's thorn in the flesh? You don't know, do you? He never told anyone. What with all those letters that he wrote to those scattered congregations, he never asked them to take long, take time enough, that he should tell them about his thorn in the flesh, his affliction. What a marked contrast to you and to me. How different from the hesitant "How are you?" that we give some people, lest it become an invitation to seemingly endless patter--to a pill-by-pill and a pain-by-pain description of their affliction.

We don't know what Paul's thorn in the flesh was. That's why this whole text intrigues us, because he makes so little reference to it, but when he does refer to it, we know that it must have been something that plagued him night and day, endlessly so.

What was Paul's thorn in the flesh? John Calvin thought it wasn't in the flesh at all. He thought It had something to do with spiritual temptation. He thought that maybe, since the apostle Paul had this marvelous experience of conversion in which he came to understand himself as a child of God's grace, in which he came to behold the lines of love upon the face of Jesus Christ, that every now and then in the course of his life he was tempted to doubt--that the devil would interfere and say, "Paul, it's only a mad dream--you never did see Jesus Christ--it's only fantasy," and that quite frequently in the life of the apostle Paul, when he went on to preach Jesus Christ, that again and again he had to stop

because his soul was vexed by this temptation. "It's only a dream, Paul. You're making believe this wonderful thing--it's only a figment of your imagination." John Calvin would have us believe that for the apostle Paul, because this thing occurred again and again, it was like a thorn in the flesh..

Martin Luther says the thorn in the flesh that came to the apostle Paul was the fact that ever so frequently he had to experience opposition and persecution, frustrated, thwarted, day by day. Look at it, my friends. After all, what was the apostle Paul trying to do? To tell people about Jesus Christ--to introduce them to his Lord and his Saviour--to give them a generous portion of God's love--and all of this he was doing freely and willingly. And whenever it happened, he found on almost every hand opposition. People did not want to hear about Jesus Christ. He had to inch his way forward for the Kingdom of God. He had always to assume the role of a good soldier--a fighter who had to face opposition, not only in the part of people in the villages, but even within his own camp, even from people that he had trusted as his assistants, and to experience every now and then disloyalty on their part. That was his thorn in the flesh--to be opposed when he wanted only to do good.

There are those who say that the thorn in the flesh was carnal temptation. The Roman Catholic Church sometimes talks about it and discovers it to be true when they find people who are willing to turn their back upon the world, to turn their back upon so-called normal day-by-day living and to confine themself to a cloister and very largely with people of their own sex. From the cloister, and from the monastery, and from the convent, there have been those who have told us that the last enemy they have had to conquer is the enemy of sex. There are some who believe that this was the great problem for the apostle Paul--to do battle against the devil in that area of his life that he referred to it as a thorn in the flesh.

There are those who say that the thorn in the flesh was a downright physical affliction , that he had headaches that came back again and again, throbbing ever so painfully, and all of that before the days of aspirin, and all of that before the tranquilizer, and all of that before any kind of shock treatment or therapy. He simply had to live with it, so great was his affliction.

There are those who say his thorn in the flesh was eye trouble. After all, he had this blinding experience and he was blinded for a number of weeks, and after all, he never totally recovered and that was his affliction. For did he not write an epistle to some of his friends and say "Look, I have to write to you in even so large letters." When he was writing to the Galatians and his heart is overflowing with affection because of them and their kindness to him, doesn't he say to them, "Why, you would have even plucked out your eyes and given them to me." There are those who say that was his thorn in the flesh.

There are those who say that it was a thorn in the flesh because he had an affliction of epilepsy and he was given to these seizures, and he could not control himself. It could become a very embarrassing thing, when he was talking about the power and might of God, and then himself to be seized upon and become physically weak.

There are those who say that in his day it was a very common thing to have malarial fever on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, and that was Paul's thorn in the flesh--this was his affliction, this burning like a red-hot poker thrust into a man's forehead, and there was no day without pain. Maybe that was his thorn in the flesh. None of us really knows.

Maybe I've wasted your time now, and mine as well, in trying to suggest that perhaps in one of these areas you could pin him down and say, "Paul, this was it, wasn't it?" It hasn't been a waste of time, my friend, because some of you have called one of these things your thorn in the flesh. One of you, even as I have recited it has said perhaps, "This is what frus-

trates me, this is what thwarts me when I would do the Kingdom's work--opposition, slander, persecution, carnal appetite, my eyes, my ears, my throbbing pain in my head." That's why I've taken enough of your time to suggest that in one of these areas there could be the thorn in the flesh.

Well, now, the question is this: What does a saint of God do when he discovers he has a thorn in the flesh? Interesting, isn't it, to note in what way Paul deals with that thorn in the flesh. Read again the epistle lesson for the day. You know what he's talking about, don't you? He's talking about his total experience in life, and he begins, God bless him, he begins, first of all, by talking about the exceedingly wonderful things that have happened to him. Why, he has seen the face of Christ! He has seen the glory of God! He has had an unspeakable joy! He has had something happen to him that he can't even put into words!

Did it ever occur to you that for some people the problem of joy could be a problem. It could be a mystery--why should this wonderful thing happen to me?--a child who trusts you-- I went with a teen-ager the other day to talk to a man, and when we left the man's office, the teen-ager said, "I would believe what that man would tell me, no matter what it would be." A priceless thing, a precious thing, to have the trust of a teen-ager. There are some of you who have it--so wonderful a thing--the love of a pure woman--the devotion of a dedicated people. These are wonderful things. We don't make problems of them, do we? Too seldom we call them a mystery.

While Paul was talking about the wonderful things that had happened to him and while he's talking about life, he says, "This, too, is life--this, too, I have tasted. Let me tell you about it. I have tasted infirmity and I have tasted affliction, I have tasted pain and I have tasted suffering." Well, when a saint, a man of God, talks about pain and a thorn in the flesh, he keeps it in the total picture of life. If good can happen

to me, maybe evil can happen to me, too. I have never said the words too easily in the burial service--"If we receive good at the hand of the Lord, shall we not also receive evil? The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Some of us almost choke when we come to that part where we have to ascribe praise to God for what he denies us.

What does a saint of God do when he discovers in the total picture of life, alongside of peace there is pain, and alongside of joy there is suffering and sorrow? He does the only human thing. He recognizes that he cannot cope with it, that is too much for him. He says, "God, take it away. God, I don't want it. I cannot be equal to it." That's the way saints talk. Give them their just due. As human as you and I, so Paul says three times, "Lord, remove it." You know that he lost count from there on in. Three times is just a figure of speech that we may know that he prayed for this thing again and again.

Now what does God do for his saints when they pray like this? Here is an uncomfortable thought for you. This God of ours is not given to partiality. Even though Paul could say, "I could preach better sermons for you, Jesus. I could touch more people and do more good. I wouldn't have to stop so often to gather strength. I could run where sometimes I have only to walk. Take it away!" What does a saint do when a saint asks God to take it away and he doesn't?

Well, if a saint can't see that the hands of God are working, he will do something else--he will strain his ears to hear what the parted lips of Jesus Christ will speak. And this is what Paul heard: "I will give you my ~~strength~~ grace, Paul, I will give you my strength--I will make you perfect in your weakness."

I stand here Sunday by Sunday endeavoring to tell you what I think is in the mind of God. Humbly, I confess to you that it is always a hazardous thing. No man can know the mind of God. I cannot tell you why God allows

some people to suffer. I cannot tell you why he even gives it to some people as an assignment. While I cannot tell you what is in the mind of God, I think I can tell you something of what is in the mind of man. I know that there are some people who go their way in life never thinking about God until they become uncomfortable with that thorn in the flesh. Men and women who will take the name of God, never in praise, but they will beg for a blessing or perhaps complain. I think I know something about man, who, in his dire need, will turn to God. Maybe that's why there is such a thing as a thorn in the flesh. Let me share this with you. Some three or five years ago, there was a business man in these United States of America who gave all of his energy to furthering his own interests. His whole world centered around him--what he could muster and what he could master. And then one day, almost in the twinkling of an eye, he became immovable, his entire body paralyzed, immovable and speechless. Through prayer, through medical science, paralysis gave way, little by little, and when speech came back, he made a confession to his pastor, "Pastor," he said, "I have always had everything except God--now I have nothing but God." And when he sent out his Christmas greetings that year he included enclosed these lines--no one to this day knows who the writer is--

"He prayed for strength, that he might achieve; he was made weak, that he might obey. He prayed for health, that he might do great things; he was given infirmity, that he might do better things. He prayed for riches, that he might be happy; he was given poverty, that he might be wise. He prayed for power, that he might have the praise of men. He prayed for all things that he might enjoy life. He was given weakness that he might feel the need for God. He was given life, that he might enjoy all things. He had received nothing that he had asked for--all that he had hoped for. His prayer was answered. He was most blessed."

"I've a thorn in the flesh, God--take it away! " And Paul heard God say to him, "No. The thorn remains. But I will give you my grace and my strength."

The sermon is entitled, "From God's Outstretched Hand." It is based upon the gospel lesson for the day. The text is the 41st verse of the 18th chapter of Luke:

> "And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee, And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight."

This gospel record is the account of a man who found himself in the unusual situation where he is confronted by the very presence of God! The eye of the Lord is focused upon him and the hand of the Lord, outstretched, offers him whatever he will take. If this should ever happen to you, or rather I should say, since this does happen to you, what is it that you take from the hand of the Lord? For, each new day, God stands by our side and, as we face any new day, God, inttruth and reality, is saying to any one of us: "Ask what you will. What, now, do you want?" Whether we name it or whether we do not name it, the desire of every man's heart is made known eventually and men get usually, to a degree at least, what they desire most. Life has a way of giving us what we really want. That may be open to question, but some have lived long enough to know that the mistake of their life has been that they have not desired to take the right thing, and they have ended up getting exactly what they have really wanted.

I once met a man who had a very strong conception of hell, and the more I think of it the more I recognize the truth inherent in it. Hell, for this man, was a situation when man had nothing on his hands but himself, as all through life that man had run his course asking and seeking nothing from life except the thing that would please him, no matter what it was that would confront him. His first and only concern was: What does this mean to me? What gratification can I gather from it? And as he went through life, he was constantly plucking from this thing or that, from this person or another, from one experience after another, only what would bring him gratification. There was no thought for God, nor any thought for the needs of others. Now when Judgement would eventually come--that great and terrible day--the man found himself with nothing on his hands but himself. For some of us there could be no torment greater than that.

If it had not been for the fact that our Blessed Lord stood there asking this man, "What do you want?" in truth I would tell you, What a foolish question! For what would a blind man want, after all? The Emperor Hadrian once accidentally shot an arrow into

the eye of a favorite servant of his. Moved with compassion, he himself went directly to the servant and telling of his great sorrow because of the tragedy and offering him some act of beneficence, telling him that his sorrow was so great that he would offer him even the half of his kingdom. And all that the man who had been made blind by the arrow accidentally shot into his eye could say was, "Give me back my eye. I want to see." Again I ask you, what would a blind man want most, as Jesus says to the man, "What is it you want me to do for you?" Not everyone may be as wise as some blind men.

Now, think for a moment, of all the things that blind Bartimaeus might have asked from the hand of the Lord. He might have said, "Jesus, you have a way with people. You can touch their heartstrings. Why don't you tab these people round about you right now, and, if need be, go all the way into Jericho, for Jericho is a rich and prosperous town. You have only to gather a fund for me. Set up some kind of a endowment for me, Jesus, so that I will always have enough to eat, so that I will always have a place to sleep. Jesus, guarantee me economical security." That is what he might have asked from the hand of the Lord. Once I read about an old lady who lived to be some ninety years of age. She was reviewing her life, and was heard to remark, "I have had a good life. I have always had enough to eat." And for some people, that is a good life--to live out an animal existence, never to go hungry, and always to have a place to sleep.

Paul Scherer, master preacher that he is, in one of his sermons once told in an imaginary sort of way about an angel of God that hovered about a congregation when they came to pray. Think of it now! Here they had come on a Sunday morning in a very august gathering to implore the Almighty God to hear them, In that atmosphere of prayer and reverence, each one in his own way, unknown to any other. As the angel of God hovered above that congregation he was searching the hearts of men and learning their thoughts, listening in presumably as to what it was that each was asking God to give him, being led to believe, of course, that as they tarried in the shadow of an altar, there was the proffered hand of God and his gracious words, "For what do you ask?" In this imaginative sort of thing, the angel of God discovers, and much to his disappointment, that their requests are basically selfish, and that so much of their desiring is involved solely with their existence in this world, and so often in the category where only a dollar sign is attached. Such

prayers as these--"O, God, help me to land that client tomorrow morning."--"O, God, don't let my competitor know of my strategy."--"O, God, make my employer feel so kindly disposed toward me that my bonus this year will be bigger than ever." Stanking in the presence of Almighty God with his hand outstretched, 'What do you want me to give you?' and the children of men, animal-like, ask only for the things of bread and butter--clothing and shelter--the things of this world. Important as they may be, and while a man may ask from the hand of God these things and I would not criticize you for such asking, for some of us fervently believe that it is by the hand of the Lord that we are fed, yet it must be said that to take only the things material from the hand of God is not to take the best that can be found in his outstretched palm. Bartimaeus was far wiser than that, for with the hand of the Lord outstretched to him, he desired a better boon than alms. He doesn't ask for economic security, an endowment fund set up in his behalf, that he should never go hungry. Nor does he say to the Lord, Jesus Christ, "You have a way with men. Why don't you so touch the heart of some man that he will decide to be friendly to me; that he will always come to my little place each morning and be to me as a white cane, and bring me to this spot where I beg. If I must be a beggar, at least ease the load for me in this way. Give me a guardian, give me a friend--give me someone I can trust." There are those who go their way through life asking that from the hand of the Lord--someone to love and someone by whom to be loved. There are some folks who feel that life has lost all of its meaning as soon as one face has been removed, as soon as they have been denied the companionship of one person. I have seen some people eat their souls out in sorrow and remorse, as life with an ugly blow has taken someone away. Life was meaningful so long as that one person lived, so long as they had a friend and companion in that soul. This is an exceedingly fine thing to ask from the hand of the Lord, and poor indeed is any man who perchance has never asked God to make possible for him some great love. But this, I say to you, even as blind Bartimaeus did not choose it, is not the best thing to take from the hand of the Lord.

With God's outstretched hand waiting to offer you what you will take, why not take the best, for the best that God has to offer can be yours only for the taking. What is the best that a man may take from the hand of the Lord? Blind Bartimaeus gives the answer: "Lord, let me see." And as soon as his eyes were opened, you know what happened,

the first face that he was able to behold was the face of God in Jesus Christ. This, I submit to you this morning, is the most wonderful thing that God offers to any man--the gift of spiritual insight--gift of spiritual vision, the capacity by which we are able to perceive the very face of God, and this might be the thing which would be the very last thing that so many of us would want from the hand of God. To see myself? Maybe. To look into the heart of my friend and my neighbor? To discern his motive--to probe his angle? Maybe. But to know what is in the mind of God, to know what God thinks of me--to know what God thinks of me and my problem--to be able to look into the mind of God and to discover that his heart is filled with nothing less than love--to be able to look into the face of God and to know that there is power in His eyes by which strength is made available to me--when God offers you his hand, you may take any one of a number of things.

I come to this pulpit for only one reason this morning--to persuade you with all the ardor of my soul to take the best that God has to offer--the best which is the capacity by which you can understand his mind, his will, and his purposes.

I would warn you, however, that whenever that is done, you will never again be the same. It will mean that you enter into a great deal of suffering; it will mean that you become more sensitive to the needs of other people; it will mean, somehow, that when you go to bed at night you shall not think of yourself and yourself alone; it may mean that you will build up a prayer list far too long for you to include them all before sleep overtakes you; it will mean that you let yourself in for a lot of joy and quiet peace; it will mean that once you see Him, you will want to do exactly what Bartimaeus did--you will want to follow him and do what He does. It takes a brave soul to ask for that sort of thing. It may be that is why it is so seldom one of our petitions.

"Open my eyes that I may see!" Bartimaeus, what do you want? "Lord, I want to see." And when his eyes were opened, he beheld the face of God.

The series of Sunday morning sermons this Lenten-tide is based upon the Gospel lessons for the day. Quite naturally, therefore, this sermon, the first in this series, is a Study in Temptation. It is based upon the first eleven verses of the Fourth Chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew.

Here is a prefatory word that ought to be said at once: In all liklihood, all that appears in this Gospel record was first related by Jesus Christ Himself. The disciple band, or even Matthew, the writer of this Gospel, would never have known this if Jesus Christ Himself had not first made plain in his own mind that this is something that He should tell them. The record reveals the fact that Jesus Christ Himself went alone into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Why would He tell them? Why should they know? Perhaps the writer of the hymn that we have just sung, and the hymn was not chosen casually--it was chosen on purpose--that even that last stanza might reflect something that was in the mind of Jesus Christ when He related the account of His temptation to his friends:

> "Well I know thy trouble, O my servant true,
> Thou art very weary, I was weary too;
> But that toil shall make thee some day all mine own,
> And the end of sorrow shall be near my throne."

Focus your eye upon this aspect of the truth: Jesus Christ held Himself responsible for the disciple band. They would have to face life without Him, and He knew how some day they would be subjected to all the fiery darts of the devil, and against that time, and against the experience of temptation He related for them what had happened to Him.

One should say to himself, then--immediately--"Now I can understand, without hesitation, that temptation is an experience common to every man-it even includes Jesus Christ." There was a time in the history of the church that they made very much of the fact that Jesus Christ had been tempted. There was a time when they made much of the fact of His humanity--He was flesh like unto our flesh, and He lived in this world as we live in this

world, and therefore remember what He had to face and, as He faced it, so ought we to face it. So, when one thinks of temptation and makes a study of it, it could well be that one says to himself, "Ah! This is something to comfort me, and this is something to give me courage--that temptation is an experience common to every man, even to Jesus Christ, and if Jesus Christ was not made immune to it, who am I, then, to think that I should run my course and never have to do business with the devil?" This I share with you in a prefatory fashion. This experience of temptation they might never have known if Jesus Christ had not told them, and that leads me to establish at once the truth that temptation is always a personal matter. I may never know what you may have to experience on the battleground of temptation, unless you see fit to tell me. You may never know what it is that vexes my soul when I am confronted by the Tempter, unless I see fit to tell you. There may come a time in every man's life when, as in the case of Jesus Christ, he is made aware of the fact that he cannot escape the Tempter. There may come a time in every man's life when he is confronted by the truth--that he, and he alone, stands in front of the Tempter, and no one else can take his place. I cannot send someone else to represent me on the battleground of temptation when my soul is involved.

Temptation--even as we read the verse of Scripture and underline the personal pronoun, "And when the Tempter came to Him..," now one must also recognize that when temptation does take place, it is usually tailor-made to the particular person involved. Temptation, while it is an experience common to all men, it does not necessarily follow that the temptation experience in itself is something that is common property, and the experience of temptation that may come to me may never come to you at all. What may bring you to the very brink of hell may not faze my soul whatsoever, and what should prove itself as my stumbling-block along the way of life might never have any attraction to you whatsoever. But the devil, the tempter,

is a very clever one, exceptionally astute, and whether this may be difficult for you to accept or not, one should face up to the truth--that the devil possesses many of the qualities common to God. He knows the mind of man. He knows what man desires. He knows his heart-throb, and the devil has a way of putting his finger upon the pulse-beat of every man's soul. When he makes his attack, he would make his attack as it would become me, and where he can make his greatest dent upon my soul. To do that, he may use a weapon or a strategy that he may not use for you or someone else. I have good authority upon which to base that thought, my friend, as I remember the temptation experience of Our Blessed Lord and this portion is based upon the experience of Our Blessed Lord. When the tempter came to Jesus Christ, he had tailor-made for him the experiences, one after the other. You must remember what had happened just prior to this wilderness event in the life of Christ. Just shortly before, Jesus Christ had been made aware in the most complete sense that He is God's Only Begotten and that God is well pleased in him. Just before the wilderness experience, even as we read the Gospel record, we discover that the Divine Imprimatur is placed upon Jesus Christ. Now, fresh from this glory, fresh from this awareness, Jesus Christ goes into the wilderness, and while He is there, the devil comes with a tailor-made temptation experience by which he would try and test Jesus Christ. Now the devil, who is clever and astute, knows what is happening to you and he knows what's happening to me. He knows our desires. He knows all that is pure and he knows all that is wicked, and he has a way of devising a strategy that's especially suited for each one of us. Notice how that strategy worked in the case of Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus Christ comes fresh from the glory of the mountain where He is made aware of the fact that He is God's Chosen Instrument, the devil comes, and notice! raising no pitchfork by which to stab the flesh. More disservice has been done us in the whole realm of temptation and the understanding of the tempter

by painting him with that red suit, horns, tail and pitchfork--he does not come that way--if he did he would frighten us and we would run. He comes raising no pitchfork. He comes raising a question mark. "If you are the Son of God"--"If you are this"--"If you want that"--"If God says you'll do this"--"If, If, If"--raising the question mark. Some of us have come to believe that perhaps the most crippling thing that can happen to us in our religious experience is not fear, as some would have us believe. Perhaps the most crippling thing that could happen to us in our religious life is doubt. To live one's life on the basis of a question mark--well maybe not so. If you are God's child, why are you hungry? If you are God's child, why are you weak? If you are God's child, why is this happening to you? There are people who, as they run their journey through life, find that again and again they become weak because there is the question mark. "If God loves me, why does He let this happen to me?"

This part of the sermon, my friend, has been written by you. This part of the sermon has been written largely by the pew and not the pulpit. Any pastor can bear testimony to the fact that, again and again, as he walks among his people, this is what he hears, "I can't understand it. So-and-So always tried to live a good life. Why should he have to die of cancer?"

Out in Axtell, Nebraska, in a home that's staffed and made possible by the Augustana Church, there is a saint, if ever I have met a saint, who, after she became thirty, was completely crippled by arthritis. If God is good, why should He ever allow that to happen? If--question mark. "We've tried to make a good and honorable home. We've tried to bring our children up in the right way, but why should they shame me?"

This part of the sermon is being written by you. Again and again the temptation to question why God allows such things to happen and to imply that if they happen, God is not good and God is not kind.

Some of us remember when we were students at the Theological Seminary at Gettysburg that there was a venerable soul who was the office secretary. She tried to put some of us on the spot when she said, "You're studying Biblical History, you're studying Christian dogma and truth, you presume to know the mind of God"--and with that very fresh background of Austria being seized and Poland being invaded, and a paper-hanger about to set a match to the whole world--and with very vivid memories in her mind of World War #1, she said to us, "I'd like to know--if God is good, why does this happen?" And the tempter comes--it could be for you as in the case of Jesus Christ he reaches for a question mark. Why? If. From the experience of Jesus Christ, Jesus says, "I want you to profit. That's how he came to me. It could be that he would come to you that way."

It could also be that, when he comes to us, he comes to talk about the things we really want, the things we would like to have. After forty days, He was naturally hungry--why shouldn't He want bread? "Look at all the kingdoms of the world--it's been made plain to you that you are to win them, you are to get them"--so the devil talks about the things that matter most, and as he used that strategy with Jesus Christ, he could use that strategy with you and me. The specific matter of the temptation might vary, but the general principle might be the same. When the devil comes to offer me my temptation experience, he may talk to me about things that mean much to me--even precious things--but then he'll say, "Why don't you reach for them my way? Why don't you grasp for the world with a devil's fingers?" That is always the heinous aspect of temptation--the inclination to take the devil's strategy and to do it the devil's way.

You must also remember in this matter of temptation that the devil kept coming back again and again. He is the prize pupil in the school that goes on the philosophy, 'If at first you do not succeed, try, try again.' No one practices that art better than the devil, and there are some of us who are inclined to think that you never quite have done with this whole matter of

temptation. Even in the life of Jesus Christ, is not what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane a stern reminder that even to the very end of one's journey, he still may have to do business with the devil? I have heard preachers on Good Friday, standing in the very shadow of the Cross, intimate that even when Jesus Christ said, "My God, My God,--Why...?"--it was only because the devil was still looming upon the horizon. 'Twould be a wonderful thing if we could reach a stage where temptation would be forever over. We would have given the devil his just due and gone our way coasting merrily to the Great Gate, but it doesn't happen that way.

Something else must be said. The Gospel writer records the temptation experience on a very positive note. The devil did go away and angels came and ministered unto Jesus Christ. When the battle is over, God remains constant, and He is there, and He might say to each of us, whenever we give the devil his marching orders, "Well done, My good and faithful servant," and when it happens again, remember that this time you did not succumb. You don't ever have to succumb. In the petition of the Lord's Prayer, it's very realistic, 'Lead us not into temptation.' We know how human we are. We know what could happen and we pray God not to lead us to the place where we are tempted to the point where we might fail.

I can never have done in my mind with an explanation that I heard once for temptation--a very vivid thing was given: the picture of an Arab tent-maker who takes a hide or a skin which he would use for a tent, and because he wants an exceptionally good tent, he will take the skin and he will pull it almost to the tearing point--not that he would tear it, but simply to see how much it could withstand.

What is the meaning of life after all, if it isn't to grow--to become strong? Maybe that's why God allows us to be tempted, and because we are human, that's why God is always somewhere within reach, but you have to remember.....don't ever take your eye away from God.

Amen.

February 22, 1959

"A STUDY IN FAITH"

The sermon is entitled, "A Study In Faith." This Gospel lesson for today, my friend, is not without the element of surprise. In truth, when one reads it, and especially as though he were reading it for the first time, he comes upon the unexpected, verse after verse. Take the closing verse as an example: "'O woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt,' and her daughter was made whole from that very hour." Jesus Christ is giving this word of praise to a woman who would not be a member of the established church. As it would appear to the casual reader, Jesus Christ is singing the praise of a woman who did not belong to His congregation, who did not belong to His denomination--to a woman, so it would appear, who was outside the faith. She was a Syro-Phoenician woman. This is a surprising thing that Jesus, who in truth seldom spoke this way about people--it was a very rare occasion when he could look anyone in the face and say, "You have onderful faith,"--seldom would He ever speak like this to a Jew. And now these words from His lips come to a woman who is outside the faith! This is a surprising thing!

It is also surprising that, as she came to Jesus Christ with her burden, believer that she was, that Jesus Christ should greet her with seeming indifference! Do you remember how the Gospel record has it--" 'Lord, help me.' 'Lord, have mercy upon me,' and He answered her not a word." The silent Jesus? The indifferent Christ? Pre-occupied with someone else? If this woman should have the kind of faith that should be so great that He should sing her praise forever, is this the kind of treatment that she deserves? Where is the gracious Jesus of whom we have been told? This is unexpected, my friend, that Jesus should greet her with silence.

And if that should shake you for the moment--the silence of Jesus--how about when He does begin to speak? They sound like cutting words, don't

they?--"I have not come but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel"--to say to this woman, "I have nothing in my heart for you because you are not of my people." Is that what these words mean, even as they were spoken? Or if that isn't cutting enough, how about the sharpness of these words, "Why, it isn't even proper to take bread from children and to give it to dogs." This is unexpected demeanor on the part of Jesus! This is surprising, to say the least!

Or, as one reads this page, one is startled by the fact that, when this woman gets any attention at all, it comes first from the diciples. Are we to believe that they are more gracious than He? Are we to believe that they are more considerate than Christ? Ah! You may make the point of the matter that they wanted to cast her a blessing in order to get rid of her, to give her something, perhaps, to send her on her way. Nonetheless, it is from the diciple band that she gets her first attention. This is surprising, to say the least! It is a record from the Gospel page that has one verse after another replete with surprise! surprise! surprise!

And that Jesus Christ should work a miracle in her behalf by not even seeing the daughter, by not even touching the daughter, by simply speaking the word, and the miracle happens! Haven't we been told--when He would even go and touch the eyes that were closed, He would touch the person whose ears had been stopped, He would command that the people be brought to Him--and then the miracle would be effective? It is surprising to discover here on this occasion that Jesus Christ works a miracle for a person that He has not seen.

But I have not come to this desk this morning to talk to you at length about the surprise element in this Gospel record. I have come to remind you that when Jesus Christ talked about this woman's faith, He called it a great faith, and we should do well, therefore, in this Lenten season, we who search our hearts and know our minds, we who talk about faith and the deepening of

the spiritual life, we should say to ourselves, "What can we learn from her? What can she teach us?" as we make a study in faith.

Observation number one, if you please: This woman's faith was a faith that was exercised personally. She came directly to Jesus Christ. Now, this is important. Some of us feel the need of intermediaries. Some of us feel the need of going to others to intercede in our behalf. There was a time in my ministry when I enjoyed the marvelous benediction of a stalwart soul of God, who would hear me again and again. I always went from his presence with my faith strengthened because I knew that when he went to the Throne of Grace, he would lift me up in special petition. Some of us feel the need of having other people join heart and hand with us in prayer, as we come to God. Some of us would not so much as think of taking a solitary path to Jesus Christ. But not this woman, for whom Jesus Christ could say, "Your faith is great." All by herself, she marks the path, and does not lean, no matter how strongly, upon anyone else.

One understands, of course, the need sometimes upon linking heart and hand with somebody else. The Roman Church, as an example, makes much of this and encourages her people to make their prayers to the saints. In fact, they have allowed some saints to become specialists, and when something is lost, for instance, you pray especially through Saint Anthony, the patron saint of all that's lost. When you take a journey, you pray particularly through the patron saint of all those who travel. Recognizing the weakness of human nature, they encourage their people to know the benefit of the prayers of the saints.

It's an interesting thing, my friend, that when Jesus Christ called a faith great, He talked about a woman who did not find it necessary to stretch out her hand or her heart to anyone else, but she came directly to Jesus Christ. This, sometimes, some of us believe very boldly, is the heart of the Protestant Tradition. There's a symbol of that in this church.

Presumably, there is uninterrupted access to the very altar, for the simple fact that we preach and proclaim that every single soul can come boldly before the Throne of Grace. Jesus said to a woman, "Your faith is great," and He said that to a woman who personally came directly to Jesus Christ.

When He called her faith great, He also recognized the fact that she came eagerly to Him--with a degree of enthusiasm. It fairly echoes in this page--"I know that You can!" "I know that You will!" "Listen to me!" "Listen to me!" "Listen to me!" From the very outset, here is a faith that is strongly positive: "I believe that You can!" "I believe that You will!" "I know that You are able!" She did not bring a question mark into the very presence of God. A faith that is great is always characterized by eagerness, by enthusiasm, by the positive accent--no hesitation--no wavering.

This, too, must be said about her faith--when she came, she came with a degree of realism. Faith, my friend, must always be realistic. It is not the figment of man's mind. It has nothing to do with wishing. It has nothing to do with make-believe. It is always willing to accept the condition in which man finds himself as over against the situation in which God's resources are always being made available. Anchor your thought for a moment at this point, just to see how terribly realistic she is. Here are these remarks on the part of Jesus Christ that puzzle us: "I'm not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel"--she was not an Israelite, yet she was asking a blessing; "It is not proper to take bread from children and give it to dogs"--and that put her in her place--'I am not of the family of the faith.' Now here was a woman who was forced to recognize herself, so it would appear, as an outsider, but she was content and realistic enough to accept her role. Here was a woman who had to recognize the fact that when she dealt with God and the Hand of God she might have to be con-

tent with crumbs! How that stabs the heart of some of us who, when we come to God, we clamor for cake--and cake with icing! Here was a woman who said, "If it's only a crumb that can fall before me, I shall take it." This is a great faith--"No matter how little it is that comes from the Hand Of God, I shall take it--I deserve nothing more." A faith that's as great as this woman's faith is always ear-marked by humility and the realistic approach, but when you and I see ourselves as we are, we know that we're not fit even so much as to take crumbs from the Hand of God.

This woman's faith is a great faith for another reason, my friend. She clamors to God for a blessing, and what does she do when her cup is filled with blessing? She does not drink it herself--she takes it and makes it operative in behalf of somebody else! Now that strikes deeply at the heart of you and me, doesn't it? When, in our moment before God, we have a chance to take--"Give me, God"--and the cup goes to my lips, and I claim God's blessing, and I would keep it for myself. Here is a woman who asks a blessing, and when it comes, she gives it to somebody else. This is great faith! No wonder Jesus Christ said unto her, "O woman, be it unto thee even as thou wilt. Great is thy faith!"

Let me catalog it again for you. It's the faith that makes the personal and direct approach. It's the faith that is realistic enough to accept one's unworthiness. It's the faith that is big enough, when it gets its answer, it's constrained to share it with somebody else.

I confess to you, this morning, that I have become intrigued in recent weeks with all that's happening in our invasion of outer space. My knowledge is so limited, but I am intrigued, nonetheless. I am completely amazed when I think of all that we're going to learn about the mystery of the universe, and even the path that we may take, even to the areas beyond outer space, may teach us something that we can see upon the face of God. Now, I have been saying to myself recently, "Well, if a man can become intrigued by what lies in his invasion of outer space, think of the glory and

the wonder that can come to him, when he recognizes the invasion that he can make into his own inner world! Think of the glory and the wonder that can come to him, when he recognizes how God can be operative within his soul!" We have yet to touch even the fringe of this whole matter of faith, of the things that have been made available and the things that are possible to people who believe!

I find my soul strangely stirred when in moments I think what could happen in St. Luke Church, if, as a church, we went from day to day, basing our program and our practice on what we believe is what God wants us to do in this our day, and through us. I am completely intrigued when I think what could happen in the course of one hour--in the course of contact with one single soul--if, by faith, I would say to God, "What is is you want me to do for this person in Your Name?"

When I study this whole chapter called Faith, I remember how, when God made His invasion here on earth, when Jesus Christ came, and then Jesus Christ returned to the Heaven, and He said to a handful of men and women, "I'm going away, and all that I hold precious I entrust to you," and how, in less than two thousand years, the world has been transformed by people of faith--this is the wonder of wonders--this is the mystery of mysteries!

God still waits, sometimes silently, sometimes to the extent that it tries your patience. God is waiting, that your eyes may be opened to the wonderful world. It falls into shape when you believe certain things about Him and yourself.

"LAST COME, FIRST SERVED" - February 25, 1959

The Sermon entitled "Last Come, First Served" is based upon the Gospel for today. The text, the 16th Verse of the 20th Chapter of the Gospel According to Matthew:

"So the last shall be first, and the first last".

A professor in our Theological Seminary at Gettysburg made a very specific mark upon the minds of his students when he would instruct them again and again that when they would come to preach upon a parable they should make absolutely certain that they allowed their people to know that in that parable there was one specific point that Jesus Christ was trying to illustrate - that's the only reason why he used the parable in order that the point that he wanted to make would be very plain to his people. Now occasionally when you and I read some page of the "Good Book" - or when we come even to a parable meant to make a teaching of God clear - we find ourselves somewhat confused. That could be very very true of this parable which constitutes the Gospel Lesson for today. It could be that here and there, there is a verse in the parable that gets in the way of the whole truth. Allow me to do this for you the right way, will you? Let me bring this Gospel Lesson into its proper setting - why did Jesus tell his hearers this certain story? Well it happened in this size.

Peter ___ _____ ____ of our Lord had made the observation that in this matter of discipling it calls for a great price and he said - let me put it to you this way - Jesus you know don't you that we have given up everything to follow you - What will we get? A very very human question. We turned our back upon our loved ones, we are going to follow you - Now in the end what will it get us? And Jesus said let me tell you something - "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto man

a household^er who said to his stewart - Go out into the market place and hire some men to work for me. Now this man had a vineyard and the time had come in the season of the year when either the crops had to be harvested, or the vines had to be pruned - whatever it was - the work had to be done and it was something of pressure, lest the work should not be done according to schedule. And so at 6:00 o'clock in the morning, that was when the day began, his representative went out in the market place where the people were to be waiting to be hired. (Something like down here at Georgia and Alaska, where men are waiting for some foreman to come and pick them up.) And at 6:00 o'clock in the morning the representative of the man who owned the vineyard said to a certain group of men - I need you, will you work for me? Yes and they bargained with him and so they set a price and a contract was established - and off they went to work. You see they were in a position where they could do some bargaining because the day was just beginning and chances are this wasn't the first man who would be looking for people to work - so these men at 6:00 o'clock in the morning made a bargain - What do we get out of it?

Now it so happened in the course of the day the foreman must have discovered that this lot he had already hired would not be equal to the task and the job would not be completed on that day - and so about three hours later he went back to the same place and hired other contingent and off they went to the vineyard. He repeated this several times until he came to next to the last hour in the working day - an hour before quitting time - and if you have ever worked for a foreman you know how eager a foreman is sometimes to lock up the whole operation - to get the thing done today - why wait until tomorrow - why carry this through to another week - and so he went back to the market place and

he found some men who were there. And he said - why are you still here? And a good and valid question - and they answered, "we are here because no one has come to hire us". And so they went and they worked.

Now before I forget it, establish clearly in your mind, with some of these people there had been a bargain made - with some of these people they had to have an assurance that their wages would be guaranteed and their right to work would be protected. With others no such thing as a bargain what so ever. The man simply said I have a job to do - and they said all right we will go with you - no contract was ever discussed. Now when the day came to an end the good man said - Bring them all together and start paying them. We will begin with the last one and then work toward the first - and when the men who were hired last came they got exactly the same wages as had been promised to the men who had been hired first. The up-shot of the whole matter was that when the final man had been paid everyone received the same wage. You know exactly what happened - there was somewhat of a riot on this man's hands - mummery and marked dissension - such gross injustice. A man who worked all day to get exactly the same wage as the man who came and worked for only one hour...A man who had to bare the heat of the day to get the same pay as the man who was in the shadows - perhaps somewhere in the market place - and now could come and work in the cool, comparatively speaking of the day. You are right, my friend, it is a matter of seemingly injustice and you are right, my friend, it doesn't make for sound economics - quickly say what you think - An efficiency expert who had been called in to delve the situation would have gone mad - And had a representative of a labor union heard anything about

it at all he certainly would have made an issue of it. This is not a matter of justice, this is not a matter of sound economics. While you say this quickly yourself, let me say quickly also - Jesus Christ was not handing out here a blueprint for labor and capital - Jesus Christ was not writing, in this particular instance, a handbook for union leaders. The Good Book begins this parable in this way --- "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto Jesus Christ" - is in a way sound economics - "is like unto" - Jesus Christ is in a way the Kingdom of industry, labor and capital - is like unto. Jesus Christ is saying - "The Kingdom of Heaven" - the way God deals with a man - not the way a man may deal with another man. That's the important thing you must remember when you come to deal with this parable. Jesus is talking about the Love of God.

Now right at this point let me tell you that justice would have had it. That if men worked for only 1/12th of the day then rightfully so they should have gotten 1/12th of the first man's pay - and these men who went to work for the first hour bargained for a denarius - that was a coin - common usage. Now that's what they were to get for _____ and it is a coin that's one-twelvth of the part of a pondion --- and I presume, rightfully so, these men who came at the 11th hour should have gotten 1/12th of the pondion....But Beloved....Jesus is talking about the love of God - and there is absolutely no such thing as 1/12th of the part of the love of God. When God loves - God loves with all the love that God has. God does not look at you, God does not look at me, and say I will give you a fraction of my love. God does not look at you, nor does God look at me and say - I will give you 1/4 more love than I will give to your neighbor. God does not think that way - God does not act that way - and that's what Jesus is trying to make plain in this parable. Peter, a disciple, would come to the company of the

believers, so eager to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, was human enough to believe - but maybe in the Kingdom of Heaven Peter might have a place at the right hand of God. Place of preferment and prestige - Somebody else in the Kingdom of Heaven would have some place less than that - But there is no such thing as a lessor part of God's love. That's what Jesus was talking about. This is not a treatise on economics, this is not a treatise on justice and fair dealings between labor and capital - and more and more it does begin to make sense doesn't it? For there isn't a single one of us who could ever merit any favor in God's sight because of the work we have done for Him. I shutter sometimes on a Sunday when I think how some men that I know could stand in this place, in this pulpit, and preach to you with greater conviction, greater clarity and greater wisdom than I. Yet if in the last day, God should judge me - I who hunger and thirst for salvation - and consign me to some lessor spot than he who has greater talent, than he who has greater skill, than he who is willing to burn the mid-night oil far longer than I, if God were to judge you, if God were to judge me by the amount of work that we do for Him and if in Heaven above there are places set aside, places of preferment - it begins to make sense, doesn't it?

For the last thing perhaps that anyone of us might want from God would be justice - to be doled out something on the basis of our merit and our earnings. And the first thing that this one man might want most from God is a generous portion of His love. That's why I agree with Dr. Ralph Sockman very easily - that perhaps it isn't a fair thing to picture justice - the blindfolded woman with a bandage over her eyes....For justice ought never to be needed simply on the basis of what has been done. It is a happy thing, always a salutary thing to look behind the situation, to probe into the background and to raise

your question - why was this thing done the way it was? Now even the parable begins to make sense, doesn't it. Why have you been in the market place all day without work and the answer was .... Not because we did not want to work, not because no man hired us. It begins to make sense, doesn't it? And they had families to be fed and they had a responsibility to meet just as well as those men who were fortunate to be able to work. So the good man said when they began to murmer - "What ails you?" Would you make my ____ ____ because you can't understand my goodness. What's this parable trying to declare for us? That at the heart of God there is nothing less than love and grace - and that's the way God deals with us - not by what we earn, not by what we merit. It is the only salutary thing that remains in the Heaven of Heaven for some of us....knowing that the heart of God is always a heart of love.

I read something during the past week....an extract from a novel written a long time ago....it is about a man who was charged with the responsibility of being a watchman for a large estate somewhere in Siberia....and usually in mid-winter he was there all by himself...and one night he hears a disturbance and runs out from the house...and somewhere in front of the property he looks and he sees two men that are about to break into the second story of this house. When he makes his presence known...and when he takes them to task...they are about to pick up an axe and fall upon him, and if they had their way they would have killed him. With his revolver he keeps them at bay...then he issues the order that one of these would be culprits is to go out into the woods and get a number of sticks and form them into a switch... now beat your companion. This he does...the blood begins to flow and

he beats him until it hurts...and hurts. Then he says to his companion with what remaining strength there is....now you beat your friend.... and so he did punish them...and then he says to himself, what now will I do with them? ...These people who would have killed me....shall I meet with justice to them? Shall I retreat them as they deserve? The story is this....he takes them into his home because they cry from hunger...feed us men, we are hungary. And into the house they go and he feeds them. Feed a man who would kill you? The watchman of the house found out they were refugees....he could have turned them in and in the end they would have been killed. Again they would have gotten their just dues. As he tells the story someone in his audience raises the question - But why did you feed them, why did you take them in? The man who had been kind to them answered - "But in this miserable world of ours someone must be good, someone must be kind, someone must deal with men - not as they deserve.

That's what makes life worth living.....For we have come to know someone.....Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord, who deals with us - not because of what we deserve, or we earn, but because his heart is good.

It may not make sense to the world....it makes sense to a man who needs more than anything else the benediction of a favor from the face of God.

Raymond Shaheen

MP

March 1, 1959

"A STUDY IN CONVICTION"

This is the third in the series of Sunday morning sermons during Lent based on the Gospel lesson for the day, the text, the 27th and 28th verses of the 11th chapter of Luke:

> "And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.
> But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."

It was a rather forward thing for her to do. The crowd was thick, to say the least. As she found herself in the midst of them, without any hesitation whatsoever she shouted a word of praise concerning Jesus Christ. What she said is something like this: "Oh, to have had a son like you! Fortunate, indeed, is the mother who brought you into the world, and blessed, indeed, is the breast at which you were nourished." She must have thought it a very pious thing that she had said. Maybe there was a feeling of well-being within her when she had come forward and had shouted what she did, while other people were silent in the company of Jesus Christ. Obviously carried away with emotion, this is the praise-worthy thing that she did, but oddly enough, Jesus Christ did not say anything to match her enthusiasm. Strangely, He speaks rather sternly and severely. He said, "But rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it--let me tell you that!"

You might think that, in a day when kindness seemed to have been rationed, when He was always going against the tide, that any good word would have warmed His heart and made Him glad. He might have gone over to the woman and said, "Come and stand here alongside of me. I want to tell you that what you have done has been a blessed thing. It's such an encouraging thing to find someone who'll say something good!"

The tide of popular opinion was going against Him. This might well ~~have been~~

have been the pause that brought encouragement. But He does not react like this. He does not single her out and say as much as, "Thank you, ma'am. Thank you for your kind words." Rather, He says, "Let me tell you something--it's far more blessed to find somebody who hears the Word of God, and lives it." Now what Jesus Christ is saying in this reply is simply this: compliments are never enough. The kind and good words that you say about Jesus Christ are not, in the end, satisfactory (forever.)

Could it have been, my friend, that while this woman, carried away with emotion, had said this wonderful thing about Jesus Christ, that in that moment He saw the shadows against the sky? He was setting His face toward Jerusalem. Perhaps, in this moment, all of a sudden He gets a glimpse of the Apostle Peter; He remembers what Peter had told Him--all the wonderful promises that Peter had made--and now He hears the words of the Apostle Peter: "Why, I never knew the man! I don't know of what you speak." In that moment He gets a glimpse of the Apostle Peter's denial of Jesus Christ--words, you see, that Peter seems now to be ever so( )

Maybe, in that moment, He caught a glimpse of that cruel experience in the life of Judas Iscariot--Judas, too a member of the disciple band, who had made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ, who had told Jesus Christ that he would follow Him. Now, maybe Jesus Christ thinks: "Words can be so cheap, my friend!" as Judas Iscariot goes out and betrays Him and sells Him, body and blood, for thirty pieces of silver.

Maybe, as this woman is shouting, "What a wonderful thing to have been your mother! What a wonderful thing to have a son like you!"--what kind of a compliment, after all, could come from a mother's lips--a wish that she could mother a son like this--and as she declares this word of praise, it could be that He gets a glimpse of that procession into the Holy City--that event so soon to take place--how the words come, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord!"--

only that those words should give way in so short a period of time to the ugly cry of

Jesus Christ had been around long enough to know how cheap words can be. Jesus Christ had mingled long enough with people on this sad earth to discover that there is a weakness in words, and that words themselves, in themselves, do not always give the substance that is most needed. Let me remind you that it is not enough to say that compliments are completely out of order. I would repeat what I said earlier. To a degree, it must have warmed the heart of Jesus Christ to have someone make bold, in the midst of a crowd, to pay Him some tribute, even as in this day, when people seem to think it a very popular thing to speak disparagingly of the cause of Jesus Christ. I am amazed, sometimes, to find the number of books that can be written by men who speak ill against Jesus Christ and the Church, and who get some kind of followers, where with reticence, adherants of the Christian faith stand silently in the shadows.

Even today, it becomes a heart-warming thing for Jesus Christ to hear people compliment Him, and the good old Scotch woman who said to her son when he went out to preach his first sermon: "Whatever you do, lad, always speak a good word for Jesus Christ,"--her advice is always in order. God have mercy upon my soul, or the soul of any man who stands at a sacred desk, who does not say a good word for Jesus Christ!

Compliments may be in order, but compliments are never enough. That's what Jesus Christ is trying to say to this woman. Beyond compliments must be conviction--conviction that is born of the knowledge of what God is and what God wills, and then the performance to back it up. Belief is important, but behavior is also necessary. Creed is essential in the Christian faith, but Creed demands and deserves conduct. What we profess is acceptable in God's sight, but more so is our performance.

You know it, I do not have to tell you, if we know anything at all about the mind of the Almighty, it must be a very gratifying thing to discover that in your case--let me put it this way--of all the things that you could have done right now, of all the places to which you could have gone, you have seen fit, by choice, to come here. What are you doing, now you are here?.....not simply asking God to forgive your sins....not simply asking God to bless you and to help you....you're not simply standing here, long on the receiving end of things----you are here also to proclaim God's praise! That hymn that we have just sung--it is a great hymn of praise to the Almighty, as before His throne we bow and offer Him our adoration. And if we know anything at all about the mind of the Almighty, it must be pleasing to Him to know that here you have come for an hour, to give praise to the Eternal God. God is awake more than an hour a week. The eye of God is focused upon us consistantly, beyond this one hour. God waits to discover what we will do with our performance, folloving this hour of profession. God waits to see what we will do with our conduct, once we have given an hour to expressing our creed. God waits to see what our behavior will be, after we have said to one another and to Him the thing that we believe and have come ..... This is always the telling indictment against any man--"I know what you say may be true, but the test of your manhood will be--what do you do?"

It's a significant thing, the symbol that many of us cherish in the Christian religion....above all other symbols....the Cross upon the altar. We do not ask that you come here to St. Luke Church on a Sunday to gaze reverently upon an open book, even though it be God's precious Holy Bible. For, significantly enough in the Christian religion, what has motivated men most has not been the Sermon on the Mount.....what has motivated men most in the Christian religion isn't so much what Jesus Christ said...as it is what He did. The Cross stands as a symbol, the Eternal Symbol, of how Jesus Christ backs up with His life, even to the very end, all that He says.

Now, I would remind you...we who are mid-way in the Lenten season... we who are almost halfway on the Lenten pilgrimage....and if Lent means anything at all it's the fact that you and I stand in the shadow of the Cross, and the light that comes from the Cross is a penetrating light. As it searches your soul and as it searches mine, it is always looking for something in particular which is this:.....Does your life match your lips?....Does your heart match your hands?....Does what you do match what you say?..... I give that to you on good authority, because that's the way it was with Jesus Christ.

The Scriptures say 'He set His face toward Jerusalem.' If you will allow a blunt appraisal of it, He was now giving the performance....that road to Jerusalem was as rugged a road as any man could ever take. This, now, was the test of tests. He had said a great deal about God. He has said a great deal about the principle of love. He had said, "Forgive your enemies. Do good to them that curse you." "My meet is to do the will of Him that sent me." He had done a great deal of preaching. This, now, was putting the preaching to the performance test. It took Him all the way to that solitary.....Calvary's cruel brow. Let us see now..... .....the world remembering Him, not only because of what He said, but because of what He did.

Jesus Christ says, "Compliments are not enough. It is conviction that matters most." Let me remind you of several things, as this sermon comes to a close. I was reading again during the week of that magnificent life of Mahatma Gandhi--how ~~H~~ he put us professing Christians to shame! I was amazed to discover that, at one time in his life, he was drawing a salary of $25,000 a year as a lawyer of distinction in Britain. There came a time in his life when he turned his back upon all that was of profit, on all that he could have of the wealth of this world, to give himself with complete renunciation to his people, the teeming masses of India. He dedicated him-

self to poverty. Somewhere in my files, I have a photograph that appeared in a magazine, of all the earthly possessions of Mahatma Gandhi. A life of complete renunciation of self. I remind myself that Mahatma Gandhi was never a Christian. When some Christians had the opportunity to ask him why he never embraced the Christian faith, you know the answer. The answer that he gave implied that he had never found enough people who backed up their Christian profession with conviction and ..... Somehow, what Christians said and what they did never quite matched as he felt they should. I know what the rumor is--that he never became a Christian because one time he was denied the opportunity to attend a meeting of Christians, because of the color of his skin. There are people who said that he was slighted and he was hurt, and so, therefore, in obstinancy and stubbornness, he turned his back on Jesus Christ. Don't be so quick to sit in condemnation on him, my friend, even if that would be true. For who did the slighting?---and who gave cause for offence? The acid test in Christianity is not how we compliment God and Christ, but how we live our lives on the basis of conviction.

I would also share this with you: there's something to be said about the peculiar old woman who came to church and, as was the custom in that church, they sang a hymn when the offering was received. Like as not, the hymn was always the same one--"We give Thee but Thine own, whate'er the gift may be"--and when they came to that part--"Not a mite would I withhold"--she she closed her lips and she would not sing. She had no intention of never keeping anything away from Jesus Christ. She had no intention of giving Him everything. Whatever else you can say about her, at least she was honest. This is what's tied up, you see, with this whole thing. When Jesus Christ rather sternly and severely says to a woman, instead of patting her on the back because of her praise, He says the truly valid thing: "A man should fear God.....lips."

The President of our Church, Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, has shared with

some of us a letter that was sent to him by a scientist....a very interesting letter.....the scientist is talking about how the military and even the legal department and certain branches of the State Department are concerning themselves about the new era, and how we are going to regulate life in outer space, what kind of laws we are going to have in outer space, and how they are preparing themselves against the day when all of these things that are in the dreaming stage might be realized. The scientist says, "And how about the Christian Church when it sees it .....that there are other people from other planets would come to our planet and they should examine our record? Christians for two thousand years! You've had one war after another! You, who live in America! You think yourselves the fairest of all the democracies and one of the most recent. Look at your record, as you deal with fellow-men! Your consistent record of second-class citizenry for any number of people! This is always..... This is the indictment of indictments!

Jesus Christ, one of the last things that He told the disciples, gave them that unforgettable, that most uncomfortable picture of Judgement: "the last day, I will say, Ye.....I never knew you!" And to whom will He tell that---the people who have called Him, "Lord! Lord!", who have paid Him compliments, whose lives, somehow or another, have failed to back up what their lips have said.

March 15, 1959

A STUDY IN SINLESSNESS

The sermon is entitled, "A Study in Sinlessness." It is based upon the Gospel for the day. The text is the 46th verse of the 8th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

> "Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?"

There is more in this text than what meets the eye at first glance. One must at once say to himself, "What is the background for this text? How did it happen that Jesus Christ spoke these words, and to whom were they spoken?"

Well, this really was the situation.....Jesus Christ had now come to Jerusalem. This was the first time that He had come to the great and holy city and confronted certain leaders of the established church. As far as they were concerned, up until this point He was nothing more than a rumor, and they had to deal only with His reputation that had come to them.

For three years now, they had heard something about the Galilean Prophet, the "Wandering Wonder-worker" who was performing miracles here and miracles there. But, to deal with a rumor is one thing...to deal with the reality of a established fact is something else. To deal with a man's reputation is one thing, but to be confronted by the impact of his total personality is something entirely different. Now that's what was happening now. Up to this time they had only rumor. Up to this time, they had only the man's reputation.

But now Jesus Christ comes to Jerusalem....as the Emerging Christ who leaves the Galilean hills behind him and stands now immediately and directly in their presence. And as He meets them----well, do you remember what happened in that Gospel lesson that I read for you?---you should have given it more than ordinary attention, because Jesus Christ comes to us in this page from the Bible in a way that He is not ordinarily seen---

----Jesus Christ, on this page, is cast in the role of "the great arguer." God should argue with men! Jesus Christ should stoop to the level that He has to raise a question and then answer it, and then answer their questions in return!.....that this whole thing should be one encounter of man almost cast in the role of putting God on the spot, and making God stoop to their level and deal with them as they would deal with Him!

I have never seen a page in the Bible precisely as this one, and I become somewhat uncomfortable when I ~~realize~~ recognize the fact that man, ...and I use the words advisedly....should force a situation where God, in Jesus Christ, must stoop to argue. But that's the reception He got. When Jesus Christ came to Jerusalem, that's the way the leaders of the established church treated Him....putting Him always on the defensive..... making Him answer to them. But because God is God, He accommodated Himself to them, and you find Him in the role of "The great arguer."

It would be an interesting thing if, when one reads the page, one could say, "Well, He convinced them, all right! They believed Him and they went away satisfied now, that, having been confronted by Him, He had the perfect answer to every one of their questions, and they'd accept the answer and they'd say nothing more." But that is not the way the story ends. Incredible as it may be to you and to me, one must read from this very page that, even after they had this encounter with Jesus Christ, the result is that, instead of falling upon their knees and worshipping Him and accepting Him....they reach for a stone....and if they had their way, the Cross would never have been necessary. They would have killed Him on the spot!

I submit to you at this point, my friend, that there's an interesting parallel in your life and in mine when one deals with this Gospel lesson for today. For every man's heart, usually we refer to at Advent-time, is a Bethlehem, and Jesus Christ would come to my heart to find an

abiding-place. One can also use the figure of speech during Lent. Every man's heart becomes a Jerusalem, and Jesus Christ, at one time or another emerges out of the past and comes to me where I am and confronts me. There's a figure of speech for you....."The Emerging Christ!" As Christ emerged out of the hills of Galilee and came to Judea and to Jerusalem.....as He becomes now for those people in Jerusalem something other than a rumor--something other than a reputation... ...so Jesus Christ emerges into my life and becomes contemporary, and I'm confronted by the reality of His total personality. I like to think that that can happen to you as it has already happened to me.

One wonders if anyone ever comes to see Jesus Christ until he is confronted by Him as a living, vital personality. To have Jesus Christ imprisoned in such fenestration as the stained glass window is one thing .....to put Jesus Christ in a figure above an altar is another thing.... ..to say that the Bible is the 'cradle' of Jesus Christ--in which Jesus Christ is to be found--is also another thing....but when the word becomes a Living Word. and when the form from a stained glass window takes on flesh and blood, to the degree at least that I am confronted by the Reality of Personality.....this is something else!

I have done what I presume any number of tourists have done. When in Copenhagen, I have wanted to go to the Church of Our Lady, impressed by any one of several things. One of them is that in the nave there are the recesses, the niches, on both sides in which Thorvaldsen has placed these heroic-sized statues of the apostles, and the most significant of all of his work in the Church of Our Lady in Copenhagen is the 'Christus' where the Christ stands with bowed head....with outstretched arms....and in Danish at the base..."Come Unto Me"....and I have found my heart strangely warmed as I went to the Church of Our Lady and was confronted by a statue of Jesus Christ.

But I said to myself, "What if this statue should suddenly take on flesh and blood?.....What if this Christ should emerge?...What, now, if I should be confronted, even here, by the total impact of His personality?" And I said to myself...."He can have no meaning for me until this does happen. He must be more than a statue....He must be more than a picture....He must be more than a reputation....He must be more than a figure upon a printed page....."

When I walked the streets of Gettysburg, I would go by the church--Christ Church--which is sometimes known as 'The College Church' and there's a series of steps that takes you up to the level of the nave. When you pass that church, you'll find on the first step or two a monument, or a memorial, that's been raised there, because during the Civil War, or the "War Between the States," a pastor of that congregation was killed in front of his church, and the good people said, "We ought not forget this. We should raise a memorial--after all, he was a preacher of the Word," and they thought it a fitting thing to put there a Bible upon a pedestal.. ...and I used to think to myself when I went by...."and there are people who are content to keep the Bible upon a pedestal....there are people who are content to keep the Bible as a symbol."

That's the only misgiving that I have sometimes, when I have what I would like to refer to as a healthy, wholesome concept of symbols---incidentally, you have never come into this place, have you, and found this Bible closed? Where on this pulpit we try to keep it always open as a symbol that this is the Open Book that can lead you to Jesus Christ--as a symbol--but even symbols can be meaningless unless they introduce you to the thing for which they stand.

The people of Jerusalem may have been content to deal with a rumor.. ...they may have been content to deal with a "wandering wonder-worker"... ...they may have been content to keep him, if they had only to deal with a man's reputation....but when Jesus Christ emerged and confronted them

them with all that He is--and He would not be content to give them anything less than He was....and I say to you that's what should happen to you and to me. Our hearts become the Jerusalem on which grounds we are confronted by the total impact of the personality of Jesus Christ, and this, I submit to you with all the ardor of my soul, is the meaning, basically, of the Christian experience!

You ask me to define and describe the Christian religion....this is what I will say to you: it is always the confrontation of man by God in Jesus Christ! I have little patience with people, sometimes, who come to the Christian religion and think that basically it is a new ethic...who think that basically it is a blueprint for a social order....this it may be, and this it should be, but basically, this is not the Christian religion! Christian religion has to deal with God and man encountering each other.

This new world--this new order--this new society for which we dream.. ...it will come only as men are made new, and men are made new only as they are made new by Jesus Christ. If any man be in Jesus Christ, he becomes a new creature. Then the old order changes, and the Kingdom of Heaven comes on earth, as men are made fit subjects of the Kingdom of Heaven and dwell here on earth. So. I say to you, that unless at some stage in your life you see 'The Emerging Christ' and you are confronted by Him, you have yet to know the full meaning of the Christian religion.

Now, what happened when Jesus Christ emerged and He encountered the people of Jerusalem? He begged them to believe, but they would not accept Him--they would not believe Him....even as He pleads with them to see what is written on the inner lining of His heart....and that's the meaning of these words, "Which of you now convinces me of sin, and if I tell you the truth, why don't you believe?" When men are given to arguing, and no degree of arguing is ever a pleasant thing, the issue becomes clouded and

the whole matter a bit hazy. But the crucial experience, the crucial moment, can come when the people involved say, "But understand my motive!" So Jesus Christ, dealing with these men, is saying, "But understand--my heart is pure on this matter! You cannot convict me of sin." When one speaks like that, one should say, "Why didn't they fall on their knees and worship Him? Why didn't they accept Him?" I must tell you why, my friend, if you do not know....to stand in the presence of one who is completely sinless is only to make me all the more aware of my wickedness, and there are some of us, when we are overcome by our evil, we are prone to hate that which is good. This is the thing about sin that condemns it forever and ever and ever....it has a way of blinding a man's ~~sinful~~ soul to what is pure--what is good.

I am constrained to say to myself that this is the nature of the whole matter....Jesus Christ had to emerge the way He did in front of these people and to expose Himself as complete and perfect God. The days were being numbered. He didn't have much longer to live. They had to see Him as He was...sinless....perfect....Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father. But that they did not want. They'd be more content with a preacher--with a miracle-worker. But Jesus Christ did not come into the world to preach....Jesus Christ did not come into the world to perform. Jesus Christ came into the world to be the personification of God, so that when men would see Him, they should put their fingers reverently to their lips and whisper...."God!"

Jesus wanted them to see Him that way, because that's what they needed. Any number of men can preach, and the world has always had some wonder-worker somewhere, but there has only been one instant's moment when the world could point and say, "Here!...The sinlessness of Christ is equal to the personification and the revelation of God!"....and they would not accept....but that's what man needs and God came to give man what he needs.

There's a teen-ager who has come to see me on occasion---she doesn't live very far away from the parsonage. She happens to be a Jewish youngster who is going to Jewish school, getting ready for confirmation. I'm so much in her debt for the kindness and the warmth with which she comes to see me, and the occasional conversations that we have had about any number of things. The inquisitive, inquiring mind of hers..."What's your church like?...What do you teach your boys and girls in Confirmation?"... then she has told me what she is being taught, and she brought to me her book, which I have read with great profit from cover to cover...but it leaves me cold. I miss the radiance....I miss the assurance....I miss the blessed token of Good News in Christ that my sins can be forgiven through Him....even when I die, I have the blessed hope of everlasting life...that I cannot buy. I know that once upon a time God made it His business to make it perfectly plain in Jesus Christ, and I also know that once upon a time there was a handful of men who had the golden opportunity to fall upon their knees at His feet....and they did not.

Jesus Christ will emerge in your life, my friend....with my whole heart I believe it.....and He'll come to show Himself to you with the full glory of the God-head....and when it happens....for God's sake....for your sake....believe Him!

March 22, 1959

THOUGHTS ON A PALM SUNDAY

The sermon is entitled, "Thoughts On A Palm Sunday." It is based upon the Gospel lesson for the day. The text is the 10th verse of the 21st chapter of Matthew:

> "And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved,"

There are any number of things that a person can say about that triumphal entry of Our Lord into the holy city of Jerusalem. But of all the things that you can easily say, here is one thing that you cannot say--no one can ever say that Jesus wento to Jerusalem on that day because He had no other place to which to go. Nor can anyone say that He found Himself in that royal procession just because He did not have anything else to do. This whole matter of the triumphal entry is a matter of design....it was planned that way....and when it happened, it happened dangerously so--and defiantly.

Now, let's take each one of those in turn. The entrance of Our Blessed Lord into the holy city of Jerusalem was according to a pattern that He must have set for Himself. I'll tell you the reason why. It seems to me that it was always very plain in the mind of Our Blessed Lord that He had come to earth to establish here the Kingdom of God....to make it known in the minds of people. He had come as God to claim the loyalty that rightfully belongs in the part of man to God. He had come, in substance, to be their King. This is the intention of His life, and we caught something of that intention, for even in the words of the Creed, we refer to Him as....'Very God of Very God, begotten, not made'....which stirs us to go on and say in words of our own making...."King above all kings and God above all gods and Lord above all lords"....so He came. But men did not always understand His role. Jesus Christ remains again and again on the pages of history as the most misunderstood of all people.

Now nearing the end of His earthly journey, He would write upon the fabric of men's hearts, He would paint for their minds an unforgettable

picture, and so, according to a design, He would dramatize for them the essence and the significance of His role in life...."I have come to be your King!".....This is what a king is like. This is not at all unusual. Prophets before Him had done it....again and again, discover how a prophet, as a mouth-piece for God, will dramatize for his people the significance of his life....and so in this Palm Sunday you have the dramatization of the role of Jesus Christ as King.

He rides into the capital city....He comes in the midst of a royal procession...and people give Him the acclamation that belongs to a king. Whatever else you may say about the triumphal entry, Jesus Christ did not do it because He didn't have anything else to do. Nor did He go into Jerusalem just because He didn't have any other place to go at that particular time. This was a matter of design....this was done by a pattern.

And when it occurred, it occurred dangerously so. Anyone worth his salt may find himself at one time or other on the risk of standing on a brink and he may have no choice. If what he is must be declared, then no matter how great the odds may be against him, he must stand his ground, and having done all, he must stand.

This was a dangerous thing for Jesus Christ to do. The city was occupied by a foreign power. It belonged to the Romans at this particular time in its history. Now let me pause for a moment and tell you something.....thirteen years of age is always an exceptionally impressionable period in anyone's life. I'm wondering now, speaking about degree, if there are any impressions that are made upon us that seem to be made so forcibly as the impressions that come to us as we enter the wonderful experience of "teen-dom" and early adolesence.

When Our Blessed Lord was thirteen years of age, in a village not so far from the town in which He grew up, a terrible thing had happened. Josephus, the Roman historian, tells us about the tragedy of Sepphoris, this Galilean village. The Galileans were rebels to the very core. They des-

pised the hand and the force of the conqueror, as is true of almost any people who feel the weight of the person who occupies his country as an alien and as a foreign power. The Galilean rebels said, "We've had enough of this....We shall revolt".....and in this village of Sepphoris there was staged this rebellion against Rome. Rome said, "No one can treat Rome like this and get away with it....we will make of you an example".....and when Jesus Christ was thirteen years of age, in the nearby village of Sepphoris, two thousand people were put to death cruelly, by crucifixion... and they took these men and placed them upon crosses on either side of the road that led to the village of Sepphoris, so that anyone who came that way could see for himself: "Thus shall it always be.....the man who revolts and puts himself up against Rome."

If Jesus Christ takes on the role of a king and enters a capital city, what, then, shall they say?....A pretender to the throne?".....Even in the face of people of His own stock--people of His own kind--who were expediently phrasing it when they said, "We have no king but Caesar,"....so Jesus Christ came dangerously...recklessly...on this Palm Sunday, into the holy city.

There comes a time when any man who has given himself to the thing that's eternally worthwhile must take his stand, and courageously so. I can't rid it from my mind--there keeps bobbing back and forth that interesting episode in England, when at the particular time in the history of that great island, people said, "We'll break away from the established church," but the established church had great influence, and when people so much as spoke against the church of England, they were prosecuted. John Wesley had some followers who went from one village to another and they proclaimed freely the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people who would not so much as darken the threshold of a church.....but they did it at the risk of their lives.

Now, in that day there was no newspaper of any sort....there was no

radio...there was no means of making an announcement, except by the town crier. One of John Wesley's preachers hired a town crier to go into the village and to announce the fact that a service was going to be held at such a place and at such a time--by such a preacher....but the town crier was a coward....but he had been paid, and to discharge his obligation, he rang his bell very weakly and almost whispered his announcement. When this came to the attention of the preacher, he seized from the town crier the bell and he, himself, rang it vigorously....he, himself, made the announcement that such a meeting was going to be held at such a place at such a time....and the preacher would be--and he named him...and then he said..."I am he!"

That leads me to this observation also...that when Jesus Christ came into the holy city, it was not only a matter of design...it was not only done dangerously....but it was done defiantly...."Here I am! I am no longer in the hinter-land! I have come boldly into your city square! I shall stand in the shadow of your temple!"....smoking out, as it were, these people who, in the shadows, had spoken against Him...."You come now and show your face, even as I show mine! I defy you to take your stand against me!" This calls for the utmost of courage.

It has occurred to you, of course it has, it would have been far easier and much more comfortable for Jesus Christ to have remained in the hinter-land and allowed Himself to establish a citadel in some remote path and then let people come to Him....like Thoreau went to his pond at Walden and let the rest of the world go by....he would think what he wanted to think, and if people didn't agree with him--well, he wouldn't get involved with it....He would not die for his cause...He's defy no one.

This is the courage that reeks with defiance, because it becomes a great challenge. The defiance of Deity, or defiance on the part of Deity is always the throwing down of a challenge. When I read the Good Book and when I go back and bathe myself in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, I

am impressed by the fact that, every time there was a single soul who came in God's name as a prophet or as a king, he always preached for commitment... ....."Decide!".....Decide!".....Make up your mind!"...."Are you for this God of mine, or are you not?"

There's that thrilling passage, when Joshua declares..."As for me and my house, we've made up our minds."....What rejoicing there must have been in heaven to know that here was a man, and for his household a decision had been made.....confronted by God, the answer is..."Yes...I decide in your favor".....That's part of the Palm Sunday episode....that's part of the Palm Sunday story----Jesus Christ coming out into the open----"Here I am....Will you follow me?..Will you accept me?..Will you proclaim me your king?"

But there is something uncomfortable about the fact that they would proclaim Him....they would shout their hosannas....they would follow Him.. ....but I say to myself..."For all of those people who shouted hosanna, the cry was the same...they had only one cry, and everybody shouted it!" That's an uncomfortable thought. You know very well it was not a matter of conviction, or they would not have done what they did three or four days later on. I'm wondering, sometimes, if there isn't a situation that speaks to contemporary Christianity....I'm wondering if it cannot be said that all too many people who shout the name of Jesus Christ, reverently and with respect, do it because they take up the song and the shout that they have heard others give Him, and it is not basically a matter of decision or personal commitment. Let me put it for you this way....they treat Jesus Christ with the same type of respect they'd give Beethoven... ...Shakespeare....or Bach. They read these men...they follow these men... ..they enjoy these men...as it's pleasurable for them...but would they die for any one of them?.....No....Would they live for any one of them?...No.. They enjoy them as they see fit to enjoy them.

Jesus Christ says, "I did not come into the world to be enjoyed."

Jesus Christ says, "I did not come into the world simply to have you bare your head & bow toward me." Jesus Christ says, "I have come into the world to claim your heart...to be your King!"

He accepted their hosannas on Palm Sunday....and He waited. I think He waited because He wanted to test their integrity.....Would they always shout "Hosanna?"....Would they? The story has a sad ending. They shouted the same cry...."Hosanna"....but when other people shouted...."Crucify!".. ..they, too, shouted the same cry.....He waited.

Beloved, that's the way it is with our God....a God of unending patience, who is willing to wait until we make up our mind....He will wait.... ...God can afford to wait....I'm not so sure that you can.

Easter Sunday, March 29, 1959 - "Thoughts on an Easter Day" - Pastor Shaheen

The sermon is entitled, "Thoughts on an Easter Day". The text is the 16th Verse of the 20th Chapter of the Gospel according to John. "Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself and saith unto him, 'Rabboni; which is to say, Master."

Try as I did during the restless hours of the night that is now passed, I could not think of this day and this day alone. But, oddly enough, in clearer focus came another Easter day -- Easter 1960 in Saint Luke Church. And I would share with you now as best I can the projection (?) of my mind as restlessly this morning I thought of Easter.

Easter next year in Saint Luke Church? I can see it now -- I would include another service in our schedule, and, oddly enough, not to be held specifically at any one of these morning hours. But a suggestion could be made that it could be held on Easter Eve, inviting our people who could come to come to this nave, this holy place, perhaps at 11:30 in the night, perhaps at a quarter to twelve, at any rate, sometime before the midnight hour. And when they did come to Saint Luke Church, they would keep the Easter vigil -- they would enter into the nave, dimly lighted, almost in total darkness, only enough light to allow freedom of motion so that the worshipper could come reverently and quietly to this place. He would discover that the nave would be very much as he left it on Good Friday. Instead of the white of Easter, there would still be these strips (?), these bands of black at the pulpit, and at the lectern. The altar would be bare; the chancel would have no Easter decoration whatsoever. The cross upon the altar would still be veiled in black.

As the service would begin sometime before midnight, keeping this Easter vigil, we would find ourselves much (?) in the atmosphere of Good Friday. The hymn we might sing would be a hymn that would deal with the resurrection and the death of our Blessed Lord. The liturgy at that point of the service could be some of the liturgy that deals even as the office for the burial of the dead. As we would approach the midnight hour it could be that here in the chancel steps there would be a speaking choir, and in the spirit of the service, they would recite the Creed, what a Christian

believes about God, about Jesus Christ. And then, very somberly, they would recite those words that deal with the [illegible] crucified, dead, buried, descended into Hell -- and at that moment the man in charge of the [illegible] would bring the lights down completely and for a few moments the Church would be in complete darkness, and we would meditate upon the terrible fact of the death of Jesus Christ, and for a moment perhaps allow ourselves to think, Suppose this had been where it ended? And once that moment had run its course, fleetingly, then these doors on either side would open, trumpeters would emerge and they would blend what they would have to offer with the magnificent peal of the organ and the triumphant note of the Christian faith be struck. There is victory over the grave! There is something more beyond the tomb! And then at that point, even included as a part of the worship experience, reverently the women from the Altar Guild would come, having been assiged their tasks previously, they would remove the black; they would replace it with the white; and the same would be said for the altar, and the veil from the cross would be removed, and we would see it shining, gleaming with the light now that would completely flood Saint Luke Church, and there would be a procession of people bearing the Easter lilies, and then there would be this transformation.

Once the Chancel had been put in order, as a part of the worship experience, then the choir would enter, then the congregation would stand, and we would sing this glorious hymn of the Easter morning -- and all of this would be a dramatization, you see, the Easter vigil dramatized for us, the glorious truth of the Eastertide -- that out of darkness comes the morn; beyond man's hate, God's love remains; beyond death there is life; beyond the blackness of sin, there is the light of salvation.

And as that picture comes now into clear and complete focus, I can picture myself coming here to this sacred desk as a part of the Easter vigil, and then I would say to the congregation: I have a word of warning, if you please. This is the dramatization of the Easter truth. This is only a symbol, this transformation. I must remind you that it was not so on that first Easter morn. No ringing of the bells; no angelic chorus; no choir of people; no blaring of trumpets; no large throng of people.

I would have to say to you, The Meaning of Easter is not to be found in this dramatization, significant as it may be. The meaning of Easter is to be found in a dialogue -- the voices of two people -- the words of the text, if you please. "Jesus saith unto her, Mary; and she replied,Master." This is the meaning of Easter. For that first Easter -- dramatize it as we may to impress upon our minds the truth -- came very quietly; so quietly, in fact, that it was as the coming of the dawn as the shades of night are turned back without ever so much as a whisper, and suddenly the world is flooded with the brightness of the morn; ever so quietly, in fact, I am inclined to think, that no one heard Mary and her friends walking so speedily -- aye, they must have run -- to the resurrection garden in the cool of the morning. Had someone seen them, I think they would have seen them

this Roman guard is keeping watch; you cannot go there.

They went ever so quietly. No one heard the stone being rolled away. That first Easter morning is so typical of God because God so often chooses to work quietly. ~~Isn't~~ Isn't it the prophet who reminds us: not in the earthquake, not in the wind; not in the fire; In the stillness of the night, in the still small voice God makes himself known; God will reveal himself. Its truth is found significantly enough in dialogue -- the soft whisper on the part of Jesus Christ of a woman's name, Mary.

The meaning of Easter is also something that happened not only quietly, but something that happened quite naturally, true, if you please, to the very nature of God. What is life for the believer except God in action? What is life for the believer except God always in charge? What is life for the believer except it be this: God always offering some good thing for me? For the believer, life is not a chapter that deals with Pontious Pilate; for the believer, life is not something that becomes the story of men and women who were the friends of Jesus Christ only to run away; for the believer, life is not something that finds itself constantly expressed by the hatred and the meanness of man. These may have their hour. These may have their day.

These may even have their generation (?). But God has eternity, and eternity is always held in the hand of God, and God always has the last word, and God always has the last deed. Easter reminds us of this thing because Easter is the very natural thing that follows Good Friday, because God is still in charge and Jesus Christ wanted so much for his disciples to remember that. You remember how we read in the page of the Sacred Book, "And after three days". Do you remember how he said, "I will see you again"? Do you remember how he said, "In my Father's place I will have a place for you"? Easter happened naturally because it was true to the very nature of God; it was true to the very heart of God. It was the most natural thing in the world that Mary Magdalene should hear her name spoken by Jesus Christ. He is ever mindful of his own. The meaning of Easter is found in the dialogue -- the dialogue of a sound of a woman's voice claiming Jesus Christ as Master.

The heart of the meaning of Easter is found in something that is personally understood. It is the personal appropriation on my part of the fact of God. It is my own personal awareness of the presence of Jesus Christ. There are any number of people in this world, in the Church and outside the Church, who can tell you that they know that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem; who can tell you that they know where he lived, what he did, where he preached. There are any number of people who can tell you this morning what He said, but not everyone can tell you this: That Jesus Christ is alive today! It is one thing to say that Jesus Christ lived; it is an entirely different thing to say that Jesus Christ is alive. Easter is the vital awareness of the experience of God at the present moment.

It may be time-worn for you R. W. Dale was for a number of years the faithful pastor and preacher of Church in Birmingham. He had been preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and as he wrestled with his sermon for Easter day -- and, whether you are aware of it or not, it is always a difficult thing to preach the Easter truth, glorious as it may be and the most wonderful thing we have to say, but to put it into words and to phrase it as it should be in this contemporary (?) moment, the freshness, the pristine glory of that first Easter morn -- that is a diffi-

ficult thing. While R. W. Dale paced his study, he was overwhelmed by the tremendous truth that Jesus Christ was there and that Jesus Christ is alive now. And he said, I know it -- I know it -- and as long as I live, everyone else with whom I may come into contact, they, too, shall know it, and my people shall know it --- and they tell me to this very day that if you were to worship in Church in Birmingham, no matter what the Sunday may be in the year, there is always somewhere in the service the singing of the hymn of the resurrection.

Easter is a dialogue -- Jesus Christ whispering my name and my response to Him -- personally done; individually done.

I have read with a great deal of profit that some time ago in Russia the anti-God movement was at its height. There was a man who had sold himself, body and soul, to such a diabolical thing. He delighted in drawing groups to himself, and then he would stand up and he would speak. And he knew great joy in exploding for these people who had believed in Jesus Christ, so he thought, their whole concept of the Christian religion. He said, It is a lie; it is a ; it is only the figment of certain people's imagination. He thought he held these people in the hollow of his hand. When he had shot their notions (?) filled with holes, he said, Now if there is anybody who wants to stand up to have always believed these things, but have been afraid so say so, you may stand up now and you may speak and you may take five minutes. At the invitation a man came forward, a priest of God. And the rabble rouser said, But remember, you have only five minutes. And the priest said, Sir, I shall not take five minutes. I ask only for the privilege of of saying four words. (Incidentally, these words he chose to speak are the words that are used ever so often in a Church who follows an ancient pattern (And these are the four words he spoke to the rabble rouser and the throng,) "Jesus Christ is risen." And much to the chagrin of the rabble rouser , almost everyone present, devout, dedicated, faithful people that they were, replied as the congregation replies: "The Lord is risen indeed". And the throng dispersed, and everyone went his way. That was the perfect answer to the spell-binder (?), the rabble rouser. Each of these people

in his own way had personally appropriated the truth of the living Christ. For each of them it was an experience.

This is the meaning of Easter: The voice of Christ and the response of an earnest soul.

How did it happen? Why was it that it was Mary, of all the people on the face of the earth who first knew the joy of Easter? It could be, my friend, that hers was the of all the people on the face of the earth longing for God. And there wasn't anything in this earth that could keep her from trying to find Jesus Christ. And when she went looking, she discovered the great joy that any Christian knows: That in his seeking he is found. He is found by God. It could be -- I don't remember that at each of the three other Easter Sundays when I have come to this pulpit I have told you this: If you remember it you can well afford to underline it again. If you hear it for the first time, I tell it to you now and once I have spoken it, it will need no further comment, for the joy of Easter ~~morning~~ is an awareness of the presence of Christ.

The old Methodist bishop was taken to task by some people because of his childlike trust in his awareness of the living of Jesus Christ. And the people made bold to say to him, almost sneeringly, But how do you know that Jesus Christ is alive? And the old Methodist bishop simply replied, How do I know? Why I just talked with Him this morning.

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THOUGHTS ON AN EASTER DAY

The sermon is entitled, "Thoughts On An Easter Day." the text is the 16th verse of the 20th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

> "Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master."

In the restless hours of the night that is now past, try as I would, I could not keep my thoughts alone on this Easter Day, but again and again I found myself thinking of Easter Day, nineteen hundred and sixty, in St. Luke Church. I'd like to share with you a bit of that projection at this time: Easter, another year in St. Luke Church, might find us including a new and different service in our Easter schedule. It would not be at this hour in the day....it would be specifically on Easter Eve--on Saturday---and those who might find it possible to come would be invited to gather here....in this holy place....perhaps at 11:30 or a quarter to 12....sometime before midnight....and when they would come to St. Luke Church, they would find it very much as they left it on Good Friday....the altar would be bare....there would be bands of black hanging from the pulpit and the lectern....the cross would still be veiled....

.....And as they would enter St. Luke Church, they would find it dimly lighted--almost in total darkness--with just enough light to allow freedom of movement from the narthex to one's place in the pew....As the service would begin--before midnight now--we would be very much in the same spirit as we left the church on Good Friday--in fact, the hymn that we might sing would be a hymn that would refer specifically to the death of Jesus Christ....the prayers that would be made would be prayers similar to those made in connection with the Office For The Dead....

.....Somewhere near midnight, a speech choir, perhaps, would be standing on the chancel steps....they would be reciting somberly, The Apostles' Creed....and as they would come to that part...."He descended into hell"--

--"buried and descended"--the church then would be in total darkness.....
.....And then, from that moment on, the positive atmosphere of the Christian faith would prevail in no uncertain way.....trumpeters, perhaps, would emerge from either of these passage-ways...and they would sound the glorious morning--the glorious note of the Easter Morn....the organist would strike up a triumphant note of an Easter hymn....and then there would be a procession of people--now it would be done as a part of the worship experience---- reverently and earnestly, members of the Altar Guild would replace the black with the white paraments....the veil would be taken from the Cross--and it would shine, gleamingly bright from the altar.....there would be a procession of people carrying lilies....and then--with the church made brilliant----- the Easter service proper would begin.....We would sing the Easter hymn.... much of the same spirit that we enjoy now would prevail.....

Why would I project such a thought with you now? Why should I challenge the people to keep an Easter vigil?...For the simple reason that in it and through it we might dramatize for ourselves the meaning of Easter. Dramatize?....Yes...to prove, in a few minutes, that out of death there comes the promise of life eternal. It was the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross, evidence of man's hate....and now shines the promise of God's love. Even from the very depth of the grave there should come the promise of life eternal....from darkness to light....from Hate to love....from death to life.....so we would dramatize in a worship experience the meaning of Easter.

But I warn you, I would be constrained to say to the congregation, "But this is not really the way Easter happened that first morning! We're simply dramatizing and symbolizing for ourselves the meaning of Easter..... There wasn't the ringing of bells on that first Easter morn!.....there wasn't the singing of a choir!.....there wasn't the assembly of a great throng of people!".....I would say, "I must remind you that the real meaning of Easter, while dramatized in this way, is to be repeated only as we remember what happened on that first Easter Morn,".....and then I would have to say

that the meaning of Easter is a dialogue--the voice of two people--Jesus Christ calling a woman by name...."Mary!"...and this woman responding..... ..."Master!!"....That's the way Easter really happened.....the most brilliant page in the Bible, at least for some of us, at this moment.

Let us think about it now. It happened, first of all, very quietly.. ...no ringing of the bells....no angelic throng....no choir....no mass of people. It happened as quietly as the darkness of the night had been cast aside, and came just as quietly as the dawn comes. One wonders if anyone saw Mary and her friends going to the Resurrection Garden in the cool of the morning. One's inclined to believe that, had anyone seen them, they would have stopped them in their steps and said, "You cannot go there.... We will hold you in suspect!....This place has been made secure!....There's a Roman guard there.....Don't you dare draw near it!"....and one is inclined to think that Mary and her friends went very quietly--unnoticed by any except God.

So Easter happened very quietly....no one heard the stone rolled away.. ...no one heard Jesus Christ get up and walk away....maybe no one heard Mary hasten toward the grave. Well, that's understandable, isn't it? So much that God does, He does quietly....like now....for some of us God is at work.. ..quietly. The pages of the Old Testament remind us of the experience of one prophet after another....not in the earthquake....not in the wind....not in the fire....but in the stillness of the night....in a still, small voice! Easter happened, first of all, with the silence being broken by Jesus Christ calling a woman by name!

That first Easter also happened very naturally...it was true to the very nature of God...it had to happen that way because God was involved! Easter is the story of life, and life is the story of God, for the believer. We do not call life a chapter about Pontius Pilate....we do not call life a chapter about Judas Iscariot....we do not call life a chapter about disciples who had made a promise and then forgot to keep it....we do not call life a chapter whereby man does his worst and gets away with it! For those who be-

lieve, life is God, and God is life, and God has the last word...not Judas Iscariot....God has the last act--not the Romans, and not the people who crucified Jesus Christ. All that happened at that Easter morning was true to type--true to God's type, that is.

Remember, Jesus Christ tried to tell them that it was going to end that way. Several times, He referred to the fact that there would be a third day. Again and again, He said, "I will see you once more." He did make the promise, "In My Father's house I will always have a place for you." For those who believe, the story of life is the story of God and God's dealing with His people. Easter had to happen that way, because God was involved.

The story of Easter is the story of a dialogue...."Mary"....and the woman's answer...."Master!" The story of Easter is as personal as that...it is, in fact, the personal appropriation of the truth of God....it is, in fact, one person taking to heart the very fact of God....it is one person being made aware of Jesus Christ.

There are many people who can tell you that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem....there are many people who can tell you where He preached and also what He preached....there are many people who can tell you what happened to Him in Jerusalem....there are many people who can tell you, "I know all about the grave!"....but the real meaning of Jesus Christ is never to be found until there are people who can say, "I have had an experience... I know that Jesus Christ is alive!" To say that Jesus Christ is alive today is an entirely different thing than to say that Jesus Christ lived in Judea, in Galilee.

Robert W. Dale, as you well know, perhaps, was a distinguished preacher of Kerr's (?) Lane Church of Birmingham. He had preached the Gospel for any number of years, but one night, when he was wrestling with his Easter message---and strange as that may be, this--the most glorious story of the Christian religion, is not easy to put into words---and while this preacher

was wrestling with that fact, he had a tremendous awareness of the reality of the Living Christ. He said, "I know it!....I know that Jesus Christ is alive!....I know that He's in my heart!...I know it right now!...And if I know it, I shall not be content until everyone that I meet knows it...and the people in my church shall know it, and they shall know it again and again---that Jesus Christ is alive!".....and they tell me, to this very day, if you were to ever visit Kerr's Lane Church on Sunday morning, no matter what Sunday it may be, the service always includes a hymn of the Resurrection.....Jesus Christ is alive!

The meaning of Easter is found in a dramatization---Jesus calling one person by name...and that person responding to the Living Voice! This is the great glory....this is the great strength of the Christian religion.... that people individually, personally, should appropriate the truth that Jesus Christ is alive!

I read with a great deal of profit the account of a man who had sold himself, body and soul, to the anti-God movement in Russia. He counted it a great honor to go and gather people to wherever he happened to be standing, and then he would expound to them on the merits of what he had to tell them. He told them that Christianity was a lie....he told them the Christian religion was a myth....he told them that this fact that Jesus Christ arose from the dead was simply the figment of certain people's imagination. He was a spell-binder--a rabble-rouser--and he had that peculiar gift by which he felt he could hold people in the hollow of his hand. So successful would he consider his efforts, that he allowed the audience to raise questions. He said, "Now, there are a number of you here. We can't allow everyone to speak. Suppose anyone who does speak, limit himself to five minutes. I defy you to challenge me on what I have said!" As soon as the opportunity was given for someone to speak, a priest came forward. The man who had been holding these people in the hollow of his hand said, (so he had thought he had held them that way) "Now, remember, you only have five minutes, because

others, I am sure, want to compliment me on what I have said." The priest said, "I do not want five minutes. I only ask for the opportunity to say four words." The priest looked over the people earnestly, and, with the eyes of a man who had sold himself, body and soul, to Jesus Christ. He simply spoke the four words which had been used in many churches that follow an ancient pattern on Easter morning....they are the first words to declared to a waiting congregation...."Jesus Christ is risen!".....and as soon as he had spoken those four words, almost to a man, the entire throng responded..."The Lord is risen indeed!"

The crowd dispersed. The spell-binder's dream--his bubble--had burst. This was the thing that confounded him.....here were people who were personally aware that Jesus Christ was alive!

You have a right to say to yourself, "But how does it happen?".....You must have the same qualifications that Mary had. Mary had a soul that was athirst for God. Mary refused to believe that anything could keep her away from God. That's why she went where she did on that Easter morning...and because God is God, that's why she was made aware of His presence.

It could be that I've told you this every Easter since I've been with you, but I'm going to tell it to you again....it's a triumphant declaration, and once I have told it to you, no further word is necessary.....Someone took the old Methodist Bishop to task...."But how do you know that Jesus Christ is alive?".....The old Methodist bishop replied, "How do I know?.... ....I just talked with Him this morning!"

He is risen, indeed!

This, certainly, is one of your very finest -

April 12, 1959

IN HIS STEPS

The sermon for this, the Second Sunday after Easter, is based upon the Epistle for the day. It is entitled, "In His Steps," and the text the 21st verse of the second chapter of I Peter:

> " For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:"

When I was made a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, I made a promise, and the promise was that whenever I would go to the pulpit, I would speak to the people out of the fullness of my heart. On occasion that promise has been kept--fulfilled more or less. There is no question, whatever, in my mind as to how I come to you today, for I speak to you now, not only from the fullness of my heart, but from the overflow as well. For one is constrained to deal with a text that spells out in its own way very brilliantly the meaning of discipleship. It gives to each of us an answer--plain, clearly understandable--as to what it means to be a Christian.

There are many ways of answering it. There's only one possible answer from the text.....to be a Christian is to be one who walks in the footsteps of Jesus Christ....and according to this text, that's why Jesus Christ came into the world--to give us the example--to be the pattern. Marking footsteps is a most intriguing thing....searching the path that one has taken.

Had I been given the privilege to stand in the shadow of the carpenter shop at any time, here is once when I think I would have asked my Lord for the privilege---I would like very much to have been there on the day when our Blessed Lord turned His back on the carpenter bench and left home....to face the world. Tradition tells us that Joseph was not there. We are lead to believe that Jesus, while in the teens, experienced the passing of His father, Joseph. But Mary, that most precious of all women, who, as the record tells us, pondered and kept all things in her

heart....surely she must have said to herself, when on that day He went out to face the world...."Where will He go?....What will He do where He goes?" Incidentally, that's the meaning of the Gospel record, isn't it? What purpose does the Gospel serve, if it isn't something of a geography of the life of Jesus Christ....a record of where He went....a record of what He did where He went.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John--they tell us about these travels into Judea and into Galilee. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John--they tell us, not only of the path that He took, but what happened wherever He was. These things serve a purpose....says the Apostle Peter....that the record of the life of Jesus Christ should serve for you as an example--that having seen it now, and having been exposed to Him, you should follow in His steps.

Interestingly enough, when Jesus Christ was here on earth, He chose certain people to be with Him, and He gave them a name--disciple--and a disciple is a learner....a follower....a person who walks in the footsteps of the master. Now this I tell you, as I said as the sermon began, is the meaning of a Christian. You can have no better description, and one that you ought not to lay to your heart any oftener than this---to be a Christian is to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

May I tell you at once, that it's not always clear in some people's minds....wittingly or unwittingly, sometimes they are led to believe that one can be a Christian by patterning his life after a patron saint--and there are some groups of Christians who hold up for their people, as an exemplary life, a patron saint, and say, "Here--follow this one!" Willing as I am to pay reverence and veneration to anyone who has virtue, I have lived long enough not to trust following too strongly a human being. The halo may be around the head, but I must admit, the feet are made of clay....And I would say to anyone who would follow Jesus Christ--remember what the Apostle Peter says--that Jesus Christ is the example, and not

necessarily a follower of Jesus Christ.

Now, this is so terribly important, and....listen, here is an illustration that will help you to understand....At the time of the Graeco-Roman Empire, when coins were made of common usage the original coin that came from the original die carried a very clear imprint....the impression was most valid....but as the borders of the empire expanded and enlarged, and as one decade passed after another, they found that they were making coins for their use--not from the original--but from copies of the original....and the farther they got away from the original, the less discernible was the original on the copies....use....soil....the common traffic of time....had served to deface what had been clearly given as the original at one time. Because that may be true, isn't it reasonable to believe that, if one is to follow Jesus Christ, then he ought to follow Jesus Christ, and not necessarily settle for a patron saint or any representative of Jesus Christ, no matter how virtuous he may be. It is simply too risky a business. So this text speaks to my condition as one person this morning....I, who almost all my life have found it easy to hero-worship....it is Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone that you must take as your pattern.

There are some people who, when they think of the Christian faith, find it a very easy thing to take the Christ of their denomination, and they follow Christ as their denomination interprets it....and that's why, when you think of some people that you may know, you think of them first as a Lutheran...as a Roman Catholic...as a Baptist...as a Methodist...as a Presbyterian...you think of them first by denominational label, because, somehow, in the following of Christ, they've settled too easily following the Christ as the denomination holds Him...and denominations are made up of people. I should be most uncomfortable if anyone of you should ever think of me first as Lutheran....I should be humble, indeed, and grateful,

if your first word for me would be---one who desires to follow Jesus Christ---and there is a difference! But there are those who, when they think of their Christian commitment, are willing to settle on that basis--to subscribe to Christianity on a denominational level....there are those who, when they follow Jesus Christ, find it easy to settle it on the basis of following a follower of Jesus Christ.

Then there are those, sometimes, who, when they think of Jesus Christ, are willing to follow Him on the same basis that their father followed Him--the same basis that their mother followed---and you live with them, and you think with them, and you work with them---you discover that the Christ that they embrace is the Christ of their father and their mother. And, while I wouldn't give much for any parent who hadn't made it his business to try to introduce Jesus Christ to his son or his daughter, I would find myself a failure, I would think, if the sum total of my son's or daughter's Christian experience began and ended in me. You see what I am doing for you....I am simply underlining again and again what Peter thinks we ought to see so clearly....that Jesus Christ is the example, and it becomes our business and our sacred responsibility to get to know Him so well that we shall follow in His footsteps.

Now....where did He go?....What do you say to yourself when you read the Gospel record?....If you're going to mark His footsteps....well.... Where did He go? The Gospel record tells us. There are any number of answers that can be given--these I choose at random....you can mark the footsteps of Jesus Christ to the door of a church. The sacred page says, "and he went to the synagogue, <u>as his custom was</u>!" Clearly shown is the fact that Jesus Christ went to church....therefore, I must say to myself, "If I'm a follower of Jesus Christ, I shall walk where He walked, and when I go to church, I shall go there because I am going where He would go!" Beloved, allow yourself the tonic of a wholesome pride in saying

to yourself, "I am here this morning because, as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, I would mark the path that He would mark, and that led eventually to a church."

Where else would He go? Use the Gospel recofd as the topography of His life--as a matter of geography....when He went into the market-place, He trafficked with people....He rubbed shoulders with them....and whenever He went into the market-place--mark you this well!--He was never less than Jesus Christ! The same person who went to church was the same person who went into the market-place....and in the market-place, you may rest assured that men could discover anguish on His face when He saw how men in the market-place were prone to cheat and to steal, when they would buy and barter....you may rest assured that in the market-place one could have discovered a look of pain upon the face of Jesus Christ when men spoke foully and obscenely. Now, what are you saying to yourself?.... "If I go to church as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ....then I, the same person who goes to church in the name of Jesus Christ, should also go to the market-place, for I, there, as a follower of Jesus Christ, must barter and buy as one never less than a Christian....if I am to follow in His footsteps."

Where else did He go? He went into people's homes....and when He went into people's homes, He went as Jesus Christ--never less than Jesus Christ. And what did He find, sometimes, when He went into people's homes?....sorrow....pain....the father and the mother who laid bare their souls and talked about a son that was not there. And He said to them, "God is our Heavenly Father."....He said, "God is concerned about every single soul." Whenever He went into a person's home, He talked about God. I'm reasonably certain that no one could ever have been in the presence of Jesus Christ for less than five minutes without being constrained to put their finger reverently to their lips and whisper the name of God. If I am to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ--if I, even when I go

visiting in people's homes (I'm speaking now as you would speak) could it be said for you--could it be said for me--that I am so walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ that even there, as I socialize, I echo and re-echo the Spirit of God? Well, when Jesus Christ went walking into people's homes, they felt instinctively the otherness of the Almighty and His Presence.

Where else did He go? As you read the Gospel record, you will discover that there were times when people gathered together in groups, arguing in the face of confusion--searching for answers to something that they felt they had to have--and it's absolutely possible to find that Jesus Christ marked a path into the very midst of those people. When He had to take a stand, He took a stand, and the stand that He took was always in God's name. Could it be said that, when you and I walk anywhere and find ourselves in the middle of something, that when we take the stand, we take the stand in the same way that we would think Jesus Christ would take it?

There's one part of the text that brings anguish to my soul because it's one thing that I never wanted to think about and the hardest thing that I think I would ever want to believe....but you can never read the Scriptures, just reading things that you'd like to believe, and you can't put blinders on your eyes and just see certain passages, and become impervious to other passages and say they are not there...."For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example".....and the Christ who is our example is the suffering Christ. And I have to admit now that if I am to follow Christ, I cannot rid my mind of the notion that there will never be a cross--never a burden. Christ, the example, carried a cross--knew anguish of heart and mind and soul.

Jesus Christ is the Christ of the Via Dolorosa--The Way of Sorrow. I have never put much stock in it, but I saw it, and I listened to their interpretation....on the Appian Road in Rome, they will show you a piece of pavement, and on this section of pavement is the impression of a man's foot, and the guide will say...."This presumably is the footprint of the

Apostle Peter, when he was confronted by Jesus Christ, and, 'Quo vadis, Domini?'-'Where are you going?'".....and in that moment the Apostle Peter was confronted again by the picture of Jesus Christ about to be crucified. And in that experience, the burden of the cross becomes the burden placed upon the Apostle Peter.....and I use it as a symbol....that there, firmly imprinted upon the way of life, is the footprint of a man who, as he walks, walks firmly because of his burden.

Beloved, if you're going to follow Jesus Christ, you'd better see that--when you become a disciple, you can't choose where you're going to go and where you can't go--"Lord, I will follow you anywhere!"--is the true mark of discipleship, and when you say 'anywhere' you look upon the map of the travels of Jesus Christ, and you'll find a lonely hill.

Should this sermon stop at that point? No. There's one other place to mention where Jesus Christ went....He went to the very gate of Heaven. This Christ who is our example, is the Christ of the Resurrection Morning. What comfort that brings to my soul....if I follow Him and walk in His steps--always and everywhere--there should never be any doubt in my mind as to where I shall end. For us, He's the only one who knows the way... and to get there?....well, the Apostle Peter says He left us an example... ...that we should follow Him.

De profundis -

April 19, 1959

THE CHRISTIAN AND SUFFERING

The sermon on this, the third Sunday after Easter, is entitled, The Christian and Suffering." The text is from the Epistle for the day. It is the 20th verse of the second chapter of I Peter:

> "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God."

I know exactly what you are thinking. If you paid any attention at all to the reading of this verse, you instinctively react in this way, don't you?....I don't like it.....I don't like it! But do I have to remind you as I must remind myself, that no one can come to the Bible with a pair of scissors in his hands and clip out any verse that he doesn't like....or come to any page in the Bible and say..."With this I do not agree, and because I do not agree with it, I shall cut it out!"..."This I do not like, and because I do not like it, I shall cut it out"..."This I cannot accept, and because I cannot accept it, I shall cut it out."... No one dare ever come to the Bible like that---scissors in hands, and go recklessly cutting here and there, any passage with which he may not agree....may not understand....may be unwilling to accept.

The Apostle Peter says, "If a man will be a follower of Jesus Christ, he shall expect that suffering may be his lot." Now, that you do not like, do you? I don't. Let me tell you this---there are several kinds of suffering, and not all people suffer for the same reasons. That's one sentence, but two specific thoughts. I would make bold to repeat it...there are several kinds of suffering, and not everyone suffers for the same reason.

There is a suffering that is physical. I think of it so quickly when I remember my friend Helen. Helen and I grew up in the same small town together--perhaps six or sever years my junior. We participated together in one of the youth groups in the parish--we were all together in just one youth group in that church--a charming child....one filled with

the grace of God. Our paths were separated all through college and seminary days, and then, after I was ordained, she came to me to be married, bringing with her the man who had claimed her heart. I have never performed a marriage service for anyone that has brought me perhaps greater satisfaction and joy. Surely life was rich in promise for both of them. They told me how they had kept their love precious and a treasured thing through the war years. They told me, now, how they had come to this day, and there would be the unfolding of one dream after another, each of them yet to tell each other, told me how they had kept a little bit back out of each pay, and then how they would tell--the one the other--that they had a down payment for their dream home. Life was going to be wonderful--life was going to be wonderful!

But the bliss was short-lived. Within months, I think it was, there came the first operation upon the brain, and then a series of brain operations, and one disappointment after another....one new area in which to enter the suffering room. Through the advice of a doctor, it was possible for her to become a mother, but I shall never forget the anguish in her face when she said, "But think of it, Pastor...I shall never be able to hear my baby cry!..."Pastor, I shall never be able to hear my baby laugh!"

Helen went on, one year after another. I'm constrained to tell you what she told me, and I honestly believe every word of it....that as a result of her affliction, there has never been a single day--there has never been a single hour--and knowing her as I do, I think I could say there has never been a single minute--when she had been completely free from pain....every moment of her existence, enduring suffering. There is a suffering that is physical....there is also a suffering that is mental. .....there is also a suffering that is spiritual...and Helen had to do battle on all three battlefronts. Out of the suffering that is physical has come the suffering that is mental....the anguish of her mind..."How can I be the mother to my child, when I am so limited?"....The anguish

that comes to her mentally...."How can I be the wife that my husband deserves, when I am so handicapped?"

There is a suffering that is physical....there is a suffering that is mental....there is a suffering that is spiritual...."Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord!".....Why? I cannot answer, and don't you try to answer her either! An answer to a question such as that must come only from the mind and from the heart of God, and must be understood as God answers, and the answer will come only to those who turn to God and raise the question and throw it into the very Face of God.

There are several kinds of suffering. There is a suffering that is physical....there is a suffering that is mental....there is a suffering that is spiritual. It would be an easy thing, I suppose, if all suffering in the world was endured by people who suffered because they had misbehaved. But there is a suffering that comes to the righteous....there is a suffering that comes to the innocent....and that remains a mystery. There is such a thing as the mystery of suffering, because there is such a thing as the mystery of good....kindness....and all that's gracious.

I cannot attempt to tell you why God should deal as graciously with me as He has, nor can you, perhaps, answer anyone why God has dealt as graciously with you as He has. For most of us, I suppose it could be said that life has a way of keeping from us the unpleasant end of an ugly state.(?) Most of us have been kept from so much that is bitter and agonizing. Why? That I cannot answer--any more than I can answer why God, out of pure love, should allow Jesus Christ to stretch forth His hand to open the Gate for me--a sinner!

Now, let's get on with this text. There is the temptation, when you deal with suffering, to enjoy the luxury of concentrating only at one point, or perhaps of allowing yourself to go far afield....but here is one text that will not allow you to go afield....here is one text that limits your thinking! This text will not permit anyone of us to enjoy the luxury

of crying out against God and saying...."God, it's unfair"...."God, what you have allowed to happen to my friend, Helen--and any Helen in your life--is unkind....is unjust"....then, if you had the courage to do it, to say... ..."It's so unGodly!".....""It's not like you, God, to let it happen!"

If this text did not limit us this morning, we's go afield that way, and we'd be very comfortable at this point....speaking up to God.... and railing against Him....but this text will not let you do that! In case you don't know why, I'm going to read it again: "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults ye shall take it patiently, but if, when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." There are only two sides to this text--there are only two sides to the coin of this truth.

First of all, the Apostle Peter says that if you are a person who has done something that he shouldn't have done and you have to pay the consequence....well, it's perfectly natural and quite proper and in good order that you should stand up to it and take it. If a man is suffering because of something that he has done that he should never have done, then let him stand up to it and take the consequences. You can understand that, can't you?

But what about the suffering that comes to a man that he has to endure because somebody else has done something that he shouldn't have done? And since life is like an ocean--like the casting of a pebble...the ripple goes on, and I am caught by that ripple, and something of the influence of the first ripple comes to me wherever I may be in this body--this ocean of life. There is a kind of suffering that a man must endure because of the misbehavior of somebody else.

But even here the text isn't talking about that, specifically. The other part of the text has to deal with the suffering that comes to a man....not because he is evil, but because he is good....the suffering that a man must endure because he is trying to do the right thing at the time to the right people, and above all else, for the right reason. But

when you do well and you suffer because you are doing the right thing---maybe you're not much interested---maybe you don't care to be that good---to want to be so good that because you are good, you will have to suffer? Most of us just touch the fringe of this whole garment of Christianity.... most of us, perhaps, have never found ourselves in the position where the anguish of mind and body and spirit is there just because we have done the good thing.

The sermon is entitled, "The Christian and Suffering," and the text allows us to believe that if you're going to be a follower of Jesus Christ.. .....what is it to be a follower of Jesus Christ but to walk in His steps?... .....and if you're to be a follower of Jesus Christ, then you can expect that you're going to suffer, because Jesus Christ traveled the road that caused Him suffering and anguish, and if Jesus Christ did not escape it, then none of us has a right to believe that he will escape it either.

That leads me to share with you three very significant observations: for the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, who will follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, he shall be expected to do good, and because he is expected to do good, he will be involved in tension and clash and conflict. The forces of evil are arrayed against anyone who goes forth to do battle for Jesus Christ, and suffering becomes his lot. The first observation, then, that a man must remember in pitting(?) with this text is that suffering becomes part of the pattern of the Christian experience. We forget that. That's why, when you come to church on Good Friday, some of you become uncomfortable when you see the processional cross veiled.... that's why some of you become uncomfortable when you come to church on Good Friday, and you see the cross on the altar draped in black....we don't want to think about a Christ who had to suffer because we want a world free from pain. We put aside the thought that the One we follow had to suffer. By the way, sometimes I wonder how Jesus Christ ever got anyone to follow Him. When I read the New Testament record as though I had

never read it before, I am very much impressed with the fact that, again and again, He said, "If you come after me....if you come after me now.... if you want to follow me....take up your cross!" He always spelled it out very clearly. I've sometimes thought that maybe--on a Good Friday--maybe we wouldn't do it, but there might be some merit in it--right here on the center of the top chancel step....we would put there a rough....crude.... cross....almost, if at all possible, an exact replica of the kind upon which Jesus Christ breathed His last and suffered in anguish....and there it would stand. If any man wants to be a follower of Jesus Christ, let him expect it....he may have to suffer....for no other reason than the very fact that he's following Jesus Christ and doing good.

The second observation that I would share with you on the basis of the Christian and suffering is this: that when a man follows Jesus Christ and discovers that his lot in life is to suffer....and he must suffer just because he is following Jesus Christ....he discovers a new relationship to Jesus Christ....he enters into the comradeship of the suffering Christ.

I cannot remember where I read it, nor can I remember the man's name and that isn't important....I was reading something about the conflict that some people knew in their minds when World War I developed. There was a chap with a very sensitive soul who could never get himself to subscribe to this business of killing....he never wanted to take a rifle..he didn't want to become a part at all of this whole bloody business of killing. He seemed to find no alternative, however, and off he went with the forces. He wrote to a friend of his that with this sensitive anguish of his heart and mind, there was a measure of comfort and courage that came to him when he trudged along wearily on the battlefields of France, and when they would be marching, even at night-time....by the light that came--even though it was only a flash from the bursting of the shells and the bombs....the way-side crucifix would suddenly come to life, and in this darkness, he would get a glimpse of Jesus Christ upon the cross...Jesus

Christ suffering....Jesus Christ carrying in His heart and upon His body the pain and anguish of the whole world. Said this man--it gave him courage....to remember that as he faced suffering, he was being sustained by Somebody else greater than he, whose lot was to suffer. When a man becomes a follower of Jesus Christ, he discovers that the one whom he follows becomes his partner. My friend Helen has been taught that....that's why you'll find a light in her eye that some of us can hardly match---we who have complete control of all of our faculties.

And the third thing that I want to tell you about this whole matter of suffering for the Christian is that, while you cannot understand it, it's part of the scheme and the plan in the mind of God....suffering becomes as a refiner's fire and it's only as we're permitted to suffer that we see some things in their proper perspective. That must be about the only thing that comforts some friends that I know in East Germany. Do you know that in East Germany today that there are some young men who are sacrificing their lives to escape, because only in the West will they be able to embrace wholly the Christian faith. Do you know that there are some sons of Lutheran parsonages where the Herr Pastorr and his wife will never again see their teen-age children, when those teen-age children leave with the blessing of their parents, because they'd rather see them die trying to escape into freedom then to live enslaved--mind and spirit.

Kaj Munk was a Lutheran pastor, a dramatist, a playwrite, a preacher in Denmark. He had a church not far from Copenhagen. He preached the full Gospel of Jesus Christ. When the Nazis occupied, they gave him to understand that he had no business to stir up his congregation on a Sunday morning to the truth of the Gospel. They were afraid of him....they gave him one warning after another. Kaj Munk went back to his pulpit Sunday after Sunday, only to discover that one Sunday would be his last. On a Monday morning, they found his body, literally riddled by bullets, in a

gutter. Why? He was a follower of Jesus Christ. He did what he thought was the right and good and proper thing. Maybe your Christianity will never exact that much from you. It's because I love you....it's because I'm concerned for the health of your soul....that I would say this to you: if you have a Christianity that has never brought you to the place where you have to suffer because you are Christian, then I'd be worried....then I'd be worried! The Good Book says that in the last great day they shall say, "Who are these, arrayed in white robes?"....and the angel of God shall say to those inside the great gate..."Who are they?...They are the ones who have come out of great tribulation....they have been made white, washed by the blood of the Lamb!"

For what glory is it, if when ye be buffeted for your faults ye take patiently, but if, when you do well and suffer for it, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

April 26, 1959

THE MATURE CHRISTIAN

The sermon is entitled, "The Mature Christian." It is based upon the Gospel for the day. The text is the 12th verse of the 16th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

> "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

This text clearly indicates the spiritual immaturity of the disciple band, and you can well afford to ask the question...."How could this have been?....Hadn't they been with Jesus Christ for three years?.....and, to begin with, weren't they a select band of people?"

Out of all the people that Our Blessed Lord had encountered, He had chosen twelve--twelve in whom He would invest Himself--twelve who would be given one opportunity after another to become 'charter members' in this school of discipleship. No matter how you may consider it, you may have to admit that they were above the average. These were people of promise. Our Blessed Lord must have been so impressed by them that He was willing to spend time with them as He could not spend with other people, and then, in the course of events, He was willing to entrust into their lives the Kingdom....once He was no longer here on earth.

Now, the time has come when He says to them...."There is so much more that you ought to know....There is so much more that I would like to tell you....but you cannot comprehend....you are not able to understand."

Now let me go back again. Bring clearly into focus this particular picture....He is not speaking to someone that He had met for the first time....He is speaking to charter members in the school of discipleship---men who had been privileged to hear Him preach--not just once--not just occasionally--but again and again....men who had had the good fortune to see Him perform one miracle after another....men who had seen Him in action in almost any condition and circumstance that life could offer...men who counted themselves the most fortunate of all people--for they were the

ones who were able to be with Him in the quiet moments, away from all the rest of the people....when they could make bold to ask Him a question---- and press Him until He would answer them directly. Ah! they were even the same group of men who would be given preaching assignments...they had been sent out with a part of the seventy...they had gone preaching...they had gone trying to declare all that they themselves had already been taught.

Now, after three years, Jesus Christ says to them, "There is so much more that I would like to tell you, but you wouldn't understand." You'd have to admit that the word for them at this point remains....spiritually immature! They are, if you will allow it, even at this stage of their development, spiritually adolescent!

What is an adolescent?...one who is no longer a child--not yet a man--neither one nor the other. An adolescent is one who has been taught, but has yet to prove for himself the validity of what he has been taught through actual experience. An adolescent, ~~is~~ whether an adolescent would tell you this or not, is one who knows only what he knows, only beaause someone else has taught him. He cannot say, as a man of fifty, "This I know, because I have lived more than four decades--almost a half a century. I have found myself at a particular juncture in life when, called upon to exercise the freedom of will, I know what it is to make a choice--for good or evil--and I, myself, responsible for that choice." An adolescent is one who is neither a child nor yet an adult....who has yet to prove for himself the validity of what he has been taught, by actual experience.

Now, this troubles me a bit. Granted that they are spiritually immature--granted that Jesus Christ should say to the disciple band that, "You are spiritual adolescents." Why, then, should He leave? Almost in the same breath when He says, "There are many things that I would like to tell you, but you cannot understand them now," He also says, "It is expedient for you that I go away." If a person is immature, is that the time to leave him on his own? If a person has yet to learn certain things, is

this the time to be without a teacher? You understand, don't you, that the basic point here now is this whole matter of spiritual maturity--this problem of maturation in the Christian life. Is it that one should remain a spiritual adolescent?...."Grow old along with me; the best is yet to come".. ...Why, then, would Jesus Christ go away from them?

Ah! but let me tell you something! You and I together, I am reasonably certain, used to say to ourselves, "Ah! If we could have been with Him then--if we could have been in the company of Jesus Christ when He was here on earth!" Remember the words of that old Sunday School hymn?..."I wish that I could have been with Him then--how He called the children to Him--how He touched them upon the head and put His arms around them"....we think we would have had an advantage, had we been there....but of those who had been there, Jesus Christ says to them, "You are still spiritually immature...You spent three years with Me, and there's still so much more that I would like to tell you, but you can't take it--you wouldn't understand."

My friend, what's to be said about us? If Jesus Christ could tell people who were in the intimate company of the disciple band, after three years, that they were spiritually immature--if He would classify them as spiritually adolescent, could it be that you and I are still in the nursery stage?...not yet introduced to the kindergarden period of Christian life and development? If immature is the word for them, what's the word for you and for me?

The basic problem remains one of maturity. How does one become spiritually mature? How does one get beyond the adolescent stage, spiritually speaking? Well, according to the plan of God, there came a time when the taught had to become independent of the teacher. This is right. The time had come when the teacher was to go away. He had taught them, perhaps, as much as they could understand, and before they could be taught anything else, they would have to prove for themselves the validity of what they had already been taught.

That's why the most difficult thing in the world for a parent is to be

patient with an adolescent, for there are some things that they must find out for themselves, if this whole process of maturation is to take place at all. In the plan of God, even Jesus Christ in the flesh had to be separated from the disciple band, in order that they should grow and develop--some things that they must find out for themselves.

I'm much in debt to a teacher that I had, that I disliked intensely one day. She cut me to size, and rightly so, for with all the brashness of an adolescent, I went to her one day with a series of six or eight questions....I thought I had put her upon the spot....I worked twice as hard getting these questions that I wanted to ask her than in getting the answers to questions she had given me the earlier assignment. When I went to her with my six or eight questions, she said to me, "You go and find out the answers for yourself---you can!" To the day I die, I shall be in her debt! for those answers I did do, and I found them out myself, and I remember, perhaps in a far better way, than had the answers been given to me, ready-made, ready-cut, full-fashioned--from the mind of another.

Jesus Christ came and taught the disciple band any number of things. He taught them something about the love of God....He taught them something about the truth of God....He taught them something about the basic principles of the Kingdom of God. But, as long as He was here on this earth, they could always come running to Him with their problems, and they forever remained dependent upon Him for the answer--and yet, as over against this--you remember what He used to do--marvelous and blessed teacher that He was!--even while He was with them in the flesh, He was still developing some process, some strategy, some technique, for maturing.

They would come to Him with a problem, and again and again He would say, "Well, now, let me tell you something,"....and perhaps He would tell them a story....and then, when He would finish with the telling of a story, He would say--do you remember these words now?--"What do you think?".....
...."Which, now, of these three, was neighbor?"....and then He'd walk away.

This is part of the process of maturing--to be able to get the answer for myself.

I make an admission in your presence this morning--it is not a pleasant thing for me to do it--I know there are some people who come to this church on a Sunday morning and go away disappointed. They have a feeling that, when they come to church and hear a preacher preach, that he should give them a blue-print for action on Monday morning....that he should be able to tell them expressly what they should do, come 10 o'clock tomorrow morning....and that I cannot do. In the Name of God, I cannot give any of you a blue-print for the action or your own personal life, and say, "Now, this is what you must do--you have no choice"....and then tell you specifically what the action should be....for life tomorrow morning will be just as different as you and I are different personally....and just as many people as there may be here right now, there will be just as many different situations confront us, come tomorrow morning.

While I cannot give you a blue-print for specific action--in the Name of God, I can do something better for you.....I can take you by the hand, and I can say to you, "Come, walk with me in the company of Jesus Christ"..... ..."Come, let me better introduce you to my Lord and my Saviour"...."Come, stay with me for a while in the presence of Him who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life.'" This is part of the process of maturing....this is part of the process of growing and developing....this is exactly what Jesus Christ did when He was here on earth.

What did He say to His disciples?...."I have called you, that you should be witness"....and as they came and spent time with Him, then they caught something of His spirit--to the end that, when He was separated from them--in the flesh--in the spirit of Jesus Christ, they were able to meet the situation that they had to confront. This is growing up--this is becoming mature.

I remember the daughter of a pastor, who came to be director district

superintendent of the Methodist Church in Sunbury, Pennsylvania. She was about to leave home--she was going to face life on her own. With kindness and reverence for her father, she came, and she said, "Father, don't you have one parting bit of advice to tell me? Tell me what I should do, when I get out." He said to her, "Alice, I cannot tell you what you should do. I shall only hope and pray that in these years that you have spent with us in this parsonage, that you have become the kind of person...that you have become the kind of person....that, come what may, you will always be able to acquit yourself, in the face of any condition or circumstance, as becomes a follower of Jesus Christ." This is what it is to grow up--to mature--to have insight, rather than to have a ready-made answer--not to depend upon the teacher, but, in the spirit of all that the teacher stood for, to be able to apply the answer that must be given.

"I have yet many things to tell you, but you cannot understand them now"....but there are some things that they could understand, and, as they remembered them, they would continue to grow....to grow....that is the meaning of the Christian life....to grow....to become a bit more mature.

I would close this sermon with this searching question---Have you gotten beyond the point of spiritual adolescence? How mature are you, really, in this matter of Christian life and commitment? One way by which you can know is this....in the face of any given situation, if I apply myself in the spirit of Jesus Christ....you have an answer. And how do I know that's the answer?....because Jesus said, "I'm going away--but the Holy Spirit will come and possess you!" When the Holy Spirit possesses a man, he shall be made adequate....and that's what it means to become mature....to be made adequate.

....and she thought to herself - "This is meant for me." ....from "Thoughts on a Sermon"

OURS FOR THE ASKING

The sermon is based upon the Gospel for the day. It is entitled, "Ours For The Asking." The text is the 23rd verse of the 16th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

> "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you."

Frankly, I admit that the sermon title in itself, as it now stands, is not a good one. It could be improved upon, I am reasonably certain, if it were not so much a statement of fact, as though it could be put as a question. So, if one were to put the title to the sermon this way, "Ours For The Asking---question mark," you'd have a far better title for this sermon. That might be a bit more plain to you eighteen minutes from now than right now.

The sermon title, as it now stands, indicates what often happens to us when we read this text. We come so quickly and so easily to only a part of the text...."Whatsoever you shall ask, you'll get"....but to deal with a half-text is as dangerous as it is to deal with a half-truth. This text must never be seen as two parts--it must always be seen as a unit...."Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you"....."Whatsoever"....we come so eagerly to this text and that's the part that we recognize at once....Ah! This is it!....God has everything and God is good, and no matter what it may be that I may ask from Him, God will see that I get it!

On occasion I have quarreled in my own mind with the type of thing that we share with boys and girls....we tell them that God is good--and that is right....we tell them that God has everything in the hollow of His hand--and that is true....but as children become older, they may cling tenaciously to this childish concept of God--that because He has everything, and because He is good, He can't possible say, "No," and whatever the thing may be for which we ask, He will see that we get it.

If only, somehow, it could be given to us to instill in their minds

the fact that, as they become older, these truths, precious as they may be, will have to be understood as over against life itself, and as over against the basic character of God Himself. For, while it is true that God is good, and while it is true that God has everything in the hollow of His hand, it does not necessarily follow that God will give me anything for which I may ask. For those of us who have done any praying at all, we have had to come upon the somber fact, occasionally, that we haven't gotten the things for which we've prayed.

There is good preaching outside of the pulpit--the stage, the screen, the printed page....if one has but ears to hear....if one has but eyes to see....he can glean precious truths again and again from many places, and so often from unexpected quarters. Take Mark Twain's character, Huckleberry Finn. Do you remember how Huck Finn tells us of a session that he's had with his Miss Watson, and Miss Watson has told him that no matter what it is, if he wants it badly enough, and if he'll ask for it often enough, he'll get it. Well, that was all that Huck Finn needed--and like a trigger it sets him off--and so he begins asking.

In one of the pages, he tells us about how he wanted a fish line and so he prayed for the fish line, or was it the fish pole--whatever it was--he got one of them, but when he got it, it had no hooks....and Huck Finn says, "What good is a line without hooks?"....and the thing troubled him a great deal. He had done what Miss Watson said...."You have only to ask and keep asking, and you'll get it"....but Huck Finn couldn't say that that was true....and after he went to Miss Watson again, he found out that she couldn't give him a satisfactory answer at that point, and she grew rather impatient with him.

Huck Finn muses as he thinks to himself, "Well, if you get what you ask for, why doesn't the deacon get back the money that somebody stole from him?....Surely he must want it back, and if he's a man of God, he'd ask God to see that he got it back, but he doesn't get it back."...."Why doesn't

the widow get back the silver that somebody stole from her?....Surely she must want it back....Surely she must be asking God that she gets it back." ....and you leave Huckleberry Finn on that page--a most bewildered chap. Somebody told him all you have to do is ask and you get it....Huck Finn asked, but he did not get it.

Maybe he's a type for most of us....maybe we, too, could say we've done our share of asking and we believe that if we ask often enough, we would get it....and here is this text which serves as a basis for this sermon right now, staring us in the face...."Whatsoever ye shall ask, you will get."

Would you believe me if I were to make an admission to you right now--that if I were to leave this sacred desk right now and walk this sacred aisle, and look both to the right and to the left, that it could be, by the law of averages, that at every third pew, I could find some one of you, the knowledge of your life already made known to me, that you have prayed.. ..you have asked God for something....and you have not had the answer to your prayer.

What can I say to you? That word, "whatsoever," seems to be quite explicit....it is comprehensive....it seems to be all-inclusive..."Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it to you."..... Ah! my friend, you must be careful that you do not deal with half the text, because, if you deal with half the text, you will get only a half-truth, and a half-truth is not good for any man's soul.

It seems to be an unconditional offer....I am making much of this point, because this is where your prayer life and mine will bog down....it seems like an unconditional offer...."Whatsoever"...."You name it"...."It's yours for the asking." And when you read this text and you stick with it, and you try to ponder the depth of its meaning, you recognize that part of a text can never stand by itself alone--you have two parts, and the two parts constitute a unit, and this "whatsoever" that looks so unconditional

carries with it a specific restriction. No matter what it is for which you may ask, you will get it--provided--that's it--Provided that you ask for this thing, whatever it is, in the name of Jesus Christ! No matter what it is that you may ask for, you will get it--provided--you ask for it in the name of Jesus Christ.

How do most of us pray?...Let's answer it together. Some of us, when we pray, pray in our own name. We think a great deal of ourselves, and see ourselves as we are, and we say, "Well, I've been baptized--I'm God's child.. .....I've been confirmed--I have taken a stand positively with those who name the name of Christ....I give myself to Kingdom work--I teach Sunday School--I sing in the choir--I've served on committees--I attend church faithfully--I receive the Sacrament--I read the Bible....Look at me, God!... because of what I am, I come to you now, and I ask you to pay attention, because of who I am!"

You may not spell it out that way, but, consciously or unconsciously, that's the way a good many of us pray. We think we have a corner on God's attention because of the record that we have written for ourselves in His name. I am not speaking disparagingly, whatsoever, of any person who will give himself to good works and order his life according to God's good pleasure--this in itself is a salutary thing, but it is not enough.

None of us will ever be good enough that we can expect God to pay attention to us because of what we are or because of what we have done..... God hears our prayers because of what He is....He is a Heavenly Father, who loves His child. But, when we pray, that's the level at which some of us begin, and the level beyond which some of us never get....we pray in our own name.

There are some people who, when they pray, they pray in the name of other people. Pastors have known good and honest people who have come to them and have said, "Pastor, I've gotten along very well in life, but now I'm confronted by this thing and my back is against the wall and I have to

cry out to God....I've been quite self-sufficient up until this point, and I confess that I'm not much of a hand at prayer....Pastor, won't you help me to pray?....Won't you pray for me?"

There is one segment of the Christian Church that makes much of this aspect of praying. They talk about the intercession of the saints....they encourage their people to pray through St. Christopher....through St. Anthony....through St. Jude. They will even encourage their people to pray.... ....for a moment I squirm uncomfortably by the overtones of the terminology.. ...to pray through Mary, the mother of God! That church teaches her adherents to pray through the saints because they say, "These people are so much better than you! They have built up meritorious lives....They've made it, (I say it advisedly, now) this matter of goodness, a business. Because they are saintly, they count each day a delightful experience to do nothing except the thing that pleases God. Now, such devotion on their part may give them an edge over you, and so, when you pray, you pray to them."

Please, my friend, I am not speaking for a single moment in a completely disparagingly way, concerning the intercession of saints. I, myself, can tell you that there are times when I have come to this desk and I have actually felt myself lifted up through the arms of other people's prayers. I have had moments of depression, and I have found myself snatched away from the hand of the diabolical one, only to recognize the truth that somewhere, I know someone had been praying for my miserable state.

I do not speak disparagingly of people who pray in other people's names or through other people. I suppose my out-spoken, my most unusual friend from seminary days, spoke truthfully, when he told me, at the Dayton convention of our Church in October---you'd have to know this chap, now, to appreciate it---there's only one of his kind---and yet, what he said is most significant. He was preaching, once, to his congregation, and the sermon never got off the ground....he just couldn't feel himself lifted up....and as he neared the end of the sermon, he took the congre-

gation by surprise, and he said to them...."You haven't been praying for me, have you?" Granted, that no one should ever go to the pulpit simply on one thought and a prayer, but God pity the congregation that does not lift up its preacher....prayerfully!

When we pray, we are to ask God for anything, perhaps--yes--for when we begin to pray in that spirit, some of us start by asking God to give us the thing because of our own record....in our own name....or we may pray in the name of other people....and, while these may be good to a degree, they are not the best. That's where the whole text comes now clearly into focus...."Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you." If you want your prayer to be answered, do not risk asking God to hear your prayer in your name or in the name of somebody else, alone, but you must pray the prayer in the name of Jesus Christ.

We might get the surprise of our life, sometime, if we were to discover that some of the things for which we pray God most earnestly, may be in themselves definitely unchristian, and, if we got the answer, we might never put the thing to the glory of God.

What is it, then, to pray in the name of Jesus Christ? If what we're going to get will come to us, if we ask for it in the name of Jesus...what is it to pray in His name?....I will tell you. From the very beginning, when a man got a name, he usually got a name because it was indicative of his character. To pray in the name of Jesus Christ is to pray according to the character of Jesus Christ....To pray in the name of Jesus Christ is to pray according to the spirit of Jesus Christ....To pray in the name of Jesus Christ is so to pray that, if Jesus Christ were in your condition, confronted by the circumstances that surround you, you should ask God for the very thing that Jesus Christ would ask, if He would be where you are. Now, that's where our praying bogs down!

That's why I say it's not a safe thing to take this title for the sermon, just as it is...."Ours For The Asking--period"....it should be..."Ours

For The Asking--question mark!" Yes, It's ours for the asking...provided that what we ask for, we ask for in the spirit of Jesus Christ, and in His name. The Church does not forget this, because the Church thinks it's so important....we are taught to pray in this way...."in the Name of Jesus"... ....Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Our Lord"...."for Jesus's sake"....and what is that except to pray in the name of Jesus?

Let me share with you, at this point, a triumphant thought....these are the days when we are looking forward to the Ascensiontide....and why did Jesus leave this earth?....because, in the plan of God, He was to continue His work in Heaven....and the Creed tells us that Jesus Christ is in Heaven, sitting at the right hand of God....and what is He doing?....He's sitting there, right now, interceding in your behalf--passing your prayers along into the very ear of God!....that's a magnificent picture of Jesus Christ that you ought not lose sight of!

Why should it be that way?....For the simple reason, my friend, and I think I am giving you now your answer....you know that you cannot trust your own judgment. None of us knows enough about himself to tell God what it is that He ought to have. None of us knows, fully, what it is about my brother--that I, myself, have a right to say, "God, this is it that my brother needs, and now, you give it to him, because I'm telling you what my brother needs!" God alone knows!

I wouldn't want to go on praying for another day, if I could not believe two things: first of all, that my Heavenly Father is so good that He can give me anything that I ought to have. My soul leaps with joy at the thought that God could say through Jesus Christ to a believer..."You can ask for anything--I have it!".....but I'd never dare to ask Him, trusting my own judgment or my own wisdom.

And my soul also leaps with joy at the thought that, when I ask, I can say...."God, let me ask according to the good pleasure of Jesus Christ!"... Don't take my word for it--take His! God would never allow us to have that

privilege of asking, if He couldn't say..."You can ask for it, but, to make sure that you ask aright, you ask for it in the name of Jesus."..... Does it make sense to you now?....."Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name---you will get it!" Take the text as a unit----deal with the whole truth---never trust yourself with a half-text or a half-truth!

..... and it washed over her again -- the wave of awe -- when she realized the responsibility and trust placed in her hands.....

from "Thoughts on the Sermon"

May 10, 1959

FERVENT CHARITY

The sermon, based upon the Epistle for the day, is entitled, "Fervent Charity." The text is a portion of the 8th verse of the 4th chapter of the First Epistle of Peter:

> "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves....."

I have not intended it this way, but it could be that if my friend is present this morning who asked me to preach a sermon about man and religion in the face of outer space, this sermon could well be my answer to him. I do not know exactly what he had in mind--I can only be responsible for my own thought on this matter. It could be that he is intrigued with the very fact that, as man contemplates the mysteries of outer space, he might come upon some new truth relative to God, the universe, and man. Maybe he would like very much if I could stand somewhat as a prophet and predict what it would be like to send missionaries to some neighboring satellite.

Maybe he would find it a fascinating thing, if I were to tell him in the course of a sermon being preached in answer to his suggestion, that somewhere in England there is a congregation that has already set aside a sum of money, small as it may be, yet it has been set aside to establish the first mission field--the first Christian congregation--on Mars....so it would seem to them, the urgency to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ unto the uttermost parts of the earth and its neighboring satellites. Maybe he would be fascinated by that thought.

Maybe it would be helpful to him, if somewhere in this sermon in answer to his suggestion, I could touch with the kind of thing that would bring comfort and courage to the family of the first man who would be sent into outer space --the first American ever to go way out yonder. What would religion... ...what would the voice of Jesus Christ, in this day and age, have to say to his father?....to his mother?....to ~~his wife~~ his wife, perhaps?....or any of

those who are kin to him?....as they wait anxiously and eagerly.

But I have not come this morning to preach, specifically, a sermon on religion, man, and outer space. But I have come in the spirit of one who wrote the Epistle lesson for the day, who knew that somewhere in his world there were men and women who ought to be told something about the Christian Gospel, and should be given some practical admonition. So the Apostle Peter, Primate to the apostles, sat down to write a letter to a number of people who had been scattered throughout Asia Minor. Now, mark you, he did not know them by name, and he did not know what were the specifics that made up their situations, day by day. He only knew that, scattered throughout Asia Minor, there were men and women to whom he ought to address some word in the name of Jesus Christ.

What would you do, my friend, if someone placed a responsibility like that upon you?....and would say, "In India, somewhere--I'll give you the name and the address of the person--is someone to whom I would like you to write, as a Christian, and, when you write as a Christian, put something in your letter that would be helpful to him as he orders his daily life."....or if the same person gave you that responsibility to write to someone in Africa....or in China....some place thousands of miles away, and you do not know the person, nor do you know the specifics of his daily situation...but, as a Christian, write to him....what would you say?

You might read with profit what the Apostle Peter did, because that's very largely what he's done in this letter that he wrote, as he had in mind Christians throughout Asia Minor. And when he wrote them, I am tremendously impressed by the fact that he gave a general bit of counsel, and among other things, he says, "Have fervent charity among yourselves." This is the one thing that it's perfectly safe for him to say....this is the one thing that, under God, he finds it necessary to say...."No matter where you may be or what you may be, this I would say always--have fervent charity among yourselves."

Now, this I would say to you, my friends....we, who live in this age, this excitingly interesting age--perhaps the most fascinating of all ages... not knowing what the shape of the future may be--but, as long as you have to live with people, and, as long as you claim the name of Jesus Christ...this I would say, in the spirit of the Apostle Peter...."Have fervent charity among yourselves....exercise the principle of love."

It must be made perfectly plain that, when people use that word charity or love, they may use the same word, but not necessarily mean the same thing. Maybe we have the right to believe that there is no word in the entire English language that suffers so much from abuse or disuse as that word 'love!' A person of ill-repute last night, meeting someone of the opposite sex, engaged in indecent behavior, could very easily use that word 'love' and what they would mean as they used it last night would be an exceedingly far cry from the kind of thing that you and I would mean if, in this place, now, I read for you that magnificent characterization of the Apostle Paul that's recorded in the 13th chapter of the First Corinthians. Yet, as we pronounced the word, it would be the same word as the person of unsavory reputation and character, as he would use it last night. One may use the same word, but may mean any one of a number of different things.

When the Apostle Peter says to people that they should exercise this principle of love and charity, what does he mean? He does not mean simply sentimentality....he does not mean being very kind to people....he does not mean being very decent to people....he does not even mean, in the common parlance, being gracious to people. The Christian interpretation of this word comes to us as we see it in the light and the life of Jesus Christ. Charity and love, as we see it in and through the personality of Christ, is activated good-will--the giving of one's self for someone else's good.

Now, that's the bit of advice and counsel that the Apostle Peter gave to any number of people....and for a practical word of admonition for us in our day--we who live in the shadow of outer space--I would have to say, as

long as we have to rub shoulders with other people....as long as we find ourselves living with people--this is the only sound principle upon which we should go on living....that, as we deal with them, we should have fervent charity toward them. Charity?....activated good-will--the giving of one's self, so that the net result is that that person is always made better because of me! If you come to recognize any other meaning for that word 'love' you still have yet to know the full meaning of it in the Christian sense, unless you can see it in that way.

Now, the adjective that goes with the noun is equally important. Says the Apostle Peter...."The activated good-will and the giving of yourself to people must be done fervently--with a burning desire, on your part, to be of some good to them." Now, when we apply this truth to our own lives, we may be forced to admit that we are good to some people because it's easy for us to be good to them. It's the easiest thing in the world for me to smile at some people, because when I look at some people, I cannot help but smile, because of the contagious quality of the attractiveness of their own soul and their own personality. It is the easiest thing in the world for me to be good to some people, because they are so appreciative and they are so gracious in their response. It is the easiest thing in the world for me to like some people, because they are so likeable. It may be very easy for me to love some people, because they are down-right loveable.

But this is not what the Apostle Peter means by 'fervent charity! To love people who are loveable....to like people who are likeable....to be good to people to whom it is easy to be good---this is just good and proper order--it is not necessarily the high point of Christian experience and practice. But, to be consumed with a desire--to see my brother....and feel compelled to do him some good--this is what the Apostle Peter means by 'fervent charity,' and it may be, at this point, that you and I fall down very seriously.

May I ask you--in the presence of Almighty God, who searches the heart...who knows the mind of man....who can try our thoughts and test our souls..

are you possessed with a consuming desire--to go out into the world and to touch as many people for good as you possible can? If you want to take the name of Christians, says the Apostle Peter, you should have fervent charity--there should be this burning desire!

One has a right to underline a pronoun--'Have fervent charity among yourselves.' One should say to himself, "Well, maybe that is the point at which to begin--have fervent charity among yourselves!" That means right where you happen to be! Let's begin with the family circle. On this day that marks the Festival of the Christian Home, as any number of churches observe it, the Apostle Peter would say to us, within the family circle.... .."Is there a burning desire on the part of any one of you, who constitute a family circle, to make certain that every single person within your family circle benefits because of you?"....Isn't it all too often true that we think the family circle should bring benefit to us? Isn't it so often that when we come home, we expect to be ministered unto? Isn't it all too often true that we expect them to exist for our benefit? 'Have fervent charity among yourselves'....that means each one of us within the confines of the family circle should count it an obligation to make other members of that family circle the recipients of our goodness and of our love.

Please do not make too much of this--but sometimes it could be said that the man in the office is far more gracious, and far more considerate to his secretary and the members of his staff, than to people who make up his own family circle. Please, do not make too much of this--sometimes the adviser to the youth--be it a boys' club--be it a basketball team----whatever it may be--may be far more considerate and far more kind to somebody else's son than he is to his own. You know the reason--we take them for granted--there is always some other time when we can make up for it---- we have any number of reasons why we allow ourselves the luxury of short-changing those who are so near and who are so dear. 'Have fervent charity among yourselves'....even in the family circle.

'Have fervent charity among yourselves,' within the family of God that's known as your congregation. Sometimes there are Christians who are far more considerate of Christians in Africa than they might be of Christians within their own congregations. If God should give me a burning passion for any one thing for Saint Luke Church, it should be that always, and under any circumstance or condition, we should be known as a people who love one another and who work for each other's good.

"Have fervent charity among yourselves"....Beloved, the advice is so intensely practical! How can other people know that God is Love, save sometime that they should know that God is Love through you and through me! I have read something about the philosophy and the mind and the attitude of the skeptic and the cynic....I have become very patient with people, I think, who say, "Well, I've never had the experience of God you've had, and maybe it could be true for you that you know God is Love, but I don't know it!"....Should I allow anyone who talks like that to go his way then---and have no concern for his attitude?

I say to myself....maybe he has never had smallpox, but most certainly he must believe that there is such a thing as smallpox, because somewhere he has seen the marks of smallpox, either in pictures or films....he believes that there is smallpox, because he has seen the marks in other people. Could it be that there are some people who will come to believe that God is Love and that God loves you, as they see the marks of love in your life and in mine?

If we cannot have charity among ourselves...if Christians cannot love one another....in the home, or in the church--or in a so-called Christian nation....what right have we, then, to expect that anyone else should come to understand that the heart of God is the heart of Love? If, loving me, I do not become loving, then does God love me in vain?

The Apostle Peter makes it explicit, doesn't he?...."Have fervent charity"....You have no choice, if you're a Christian. For the Christian, love

does become a matter of will--you commit yourself to living that kind of love--you make up your mind that you want to become loved. Maybe that's the way it happens....to become loved, you make up your mind that you want to be that way....and, if it takes a miracle....well, maybe that's the point at which the miracle must first begin!

"..... could it be that the thoughts she harbored were tantamount to the deed, and so engendered a condition not conducive to 'activated good-will' in the family circle?"

"Thoughts on the Human

May 17, 1959

LESSONS FROM PENTECOST

The sermon is entitled, "Lessons From Pentecost." The text is from the Epistle for the day. It is the 1st verse of the 2nd chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles:

> "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come,
> they were all with one accord in one place.
> And suddenly....."

No one, from that point on, knows exactly how it happened. Everyone who was present knew that there was a great, divine disturbance. Something tremendously wonderful took place, the like of which had never occurred before, but when they came to describe what it was, as to how it happened, they were always at a loss for words. They went reaching for this descriptive and went reaching for some other descriptive, as to how this thing happened. What you have in the record here, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, is a distillation, I suppose,--a composite of what different people said, and as the impression remained, years afterward.

There were those who said...."This thing happened and it was like a great noise!"....There were those who said...."It was like the rushing of a mighty wind!"....There were those who said...."It was like a cloud of fire!". ....As to how it happened--well, I can't tell you. I have simply come to underline the fact that something tremendously wonderful happened that day, the like of which had never occurred before and, once it happened, the world has never been the same since, even as the men and women to whom the thing occurred were changed.

This morning, one comes to this pulpit in the same spirit, I suppose, as the old Negro who was found kneeling at the grave-site of General Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army. Let me say, quite parenthetically,--I do not know how much you have read about the Salvation Army, especially in the day of its inception, but, from what I have read, and from what I have come to understand, it was an exceedingly wonderful, vitalizing force for the Kingdom--where men and women, baptized by the Spirit, turned their back upon so

much of organization and committee structure and simply went out armed only with the Spirit of God, to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to offer a helpful ministry to people, wherever they could find them. Theirs was the philosophy--"If the people will not come to the church, then we will go to them, in the name of Jesus Christ." As I have read something of their life and of their work, I am forced to admit that I would use this descriptive for them, especially at the time of their beginning--that they were 'straight-shooters for souls'....they had only one ambition....to touch people for good in the name of God.

This old Negro, now with this as a bit of back-ground, was found kneeling at the grave-site of General Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, and someone heard him murmer a prayer...."O God, do it again! O God, let it happen now!" His earnest petition was, that as General Booth was set on fire by God and re-vitalized, so, perhaps, this thing could happen to him--so it could happen to some of his friends.

In that spirit, I come to this pulpit with a prayer upon my heart:..... "O God, let Pentecost happen again! Do it now--perhaps here!" I am forced to recognize the truth that there are those who say that there can never be parallel events in history--that God himself does not deal in duplicates--in men or in events....that you can never again find exactly the same thing being reproduced. Now if that should be so, then maybe we should modify our prayer and say...."O God, as Thy Holy Spirit came to men and women on the day of Pentecost, so enable us to meet a similar condition, that the baptism of thy Holy Spirit may come to us!"....and, in that spirit, I would say on this day of Pentecost--at least here's the prayer of one person, remembering Pentecost then and there--"Do it again, God....let the baptism of thy Holy Spirit come upon us."

As we remember the day of Pentecost, what, then, are the lessons that should come to us? May I suggest Lesson #1: That Pentecost reminds us that God fulfills His promises...."And when the day of Pentecost was fully come"..

....This had been predicted--this had been promised! Jesus Christ had told His friends that what happened would happen...."I will see you again"..."I will not leave you comfortless"....The Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the Paraclete--He will come to you and when I get to Heaven, in my name, the Father will send Him to you." These are the promises that He made and Pentecost is Exhibit A, at least for our purpose this morning, that the promises that God makes are fulfilled.

You know, of course, that we are weak. You know that it's not always easy for us to remember promises that we make or promises that are made to us. It's a comparatively easy thing for us to meet in the quiet of this beautiful Sabbath day in a place as lovely as this and to remind ourselves that we are God's children and God is good to us---right now.

I can remember even as an impressionable adolescent singing the hymn out of an old Sunday School book--"Standing On The Promises of Christ, My King"--how we sang that lustily! It may not be good music, but the text and the thought is basic--that a Christian is one who should remember that the promises that Christ makes should be remembered, and He will fulfill them. It's one thing to remember the promises now, but when the pressures of life become great, we will be of all people the most bewildered and benighted, if we cannot say to ourselves..."But His promise will be kept!"

What was it that kept David Livingstone going about his work diligently, day by day, in darkest Africa, when all the odds seemed against him? He told some of his friends about his favorite passage of Scripture--"Lo, I am with you alway...."--the word of Jesus Christ--and David Livingstone himself adds these words when he shares this text with some of his friends, ..."It is the word of a gentleman, who keeps His promise."

To remember the promises of God when the pressures of life are against us--when all of life seems to be falling apart....to remember that the Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms....to remember that 'there shall no evil befall thee'....to remember that the Lord is thy

Shepherd--you shall not want....to remember 'Lo, I am with you always.'..... Pentecost says to us...."As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, whatever else happens to you, try to remember that the promises of God will be fulfilled." "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come....."--it came true, as promised.

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come...."--they were there! The promises of God are fulfilled to those who would remember them and to those who obey Him. The miracle of Pentecost became a reality to certain men and women who were the people who remembered the promise and were people who obeyed what Jesus Christ had commanded. You remember the command that He made to his friends?...."Tarry here and ye shall receive power.... "...You wait here in Jerusalem until this thing happens."

Wait in Jerusalem?....In this city that killed Jesus Christ?....In this city where feeling was so great that they could take the Son of God and have done with Him?....In this city where they would be marked people? ....In this city where every movement that they made would come under close scrutiny on the part of some people? The miracle of Pentecost became a reality to certain people who would not allow themselves to forget the promises of God through Christ, and who remembered to obey!

"When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were with one accord... ...in one place." Lesson #3 from Pentecost: It happened to a people--united!

Someone has said that there are two things that bring people together. There is the threat of danger--a common peril--can force people to think together....work together....even huddle together. This is an unfortunate way to put it, but there are some people who get a peculiar kind of nostalgia for the days of World War II because, when they were confronted by a common enemy, they worked together, they were drawn together, they made a common front against a common enemy. Somebody has put it this way: "Calamity becomes a mighty leveler." All of us stand on common ground when we are confronted by a common peril.

But, on the other hand, there is something else that brings people together, and that is a common devotion--a common devotion to a common person or a common thing--to one thing or one person that we hold...together....to which we hold together.

I like to think that, had one of us been standing guard at the door that led to the Upper Room where these people were gathered together, and we would have said to each one of them in turn...."What brings you here?".. ...You know the answer....each, in turn, would have said--"Jesus Christ." Each of them had had an experience of Jesus Christ....each had come to love Him....each had come to know His love.

You may rest assured that they were exceedingly different--different in their background--different in their temperament--different in their personalities--different in their capabilities....variety is the one great word for the Christian Church. But they were of one mind and of one spirit..... .."What brings you here?"....."Jesus Christ."

Let me pause, for a moment, to remind you that this great, wonderful blessing of Pentecost did not happen to people individually--separately. With my whole heart, I believe that God has a way of making Himself plain to any man anywhere. God can do it. And you and I know that we've had moments by ourselves when we've been lifted up into the very presence of God and have had moments of exultation.

But God does not limit Himself to that particular way of working. There come moments when God reveals Himself in a special way--only to a group of people--only to people who are assembled together. I would remind you that when, as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you allow yourself to be separated from the family of God, either within your own parish, or within the whole family of God throughout Christendom--when you allow yourself to be separated from that group, you run the risk of missing a blessing which God ofttimes reserves to be bestowed upon a people when they are together.

I would not come to this pulpit another Sunday if I did not, with my whole heart, believe that, when we come together on a Sunday, there is a particular blessing which God waits to bestow upon us as a people that otherwise, as individuals, we might not know--and if that can be said for one little segment of the whole family of God, it can be said for the whole family of God throughout the world.

When these people came together, they were not mindful of their differences--they were simply aware of what they had in common. I say to you as advisedly as I can--at this particular moment, there is no other field of endeavor that I would welcome for myself than to be the Pastor of Saint Luke Church; but sometimes I find myself envying a member of this parish, who is the Executive Secretary of the Council of Churches in the National Capitol Area, who spends his time and his energy reminding Christians of the things they have in common and of the great work that can be done when they are united, in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

It must be an exceedingly wonderful thing to go one's way, day by day, simply reminding people of the things they have in common, in the name of Jesus Christ....or anyone who may be able to serve in that glorious capacity. Lesson #3 is to be found in the fact that Pentecost happened when people were drawn together because they had Jesus Christ in their midst, and Jesus Christ was in their midst because He was first in the heart of every single person.

Now, the fourth lesson from Pentecost is this: that after it happened--after they were baptized with the Holy Spirit, they went out to confront the world, They had this interesting way of ~~putting~~ putting it--these people who went out on the Pentecost experience "turned the world upside-down"---- and how did they do it?....I do not speak facetiously now....but they did not go out and confront the world and say--"The committee has met and the committee recommends..."....mark you!....they went out to confront a world that was deteriorating....disintegrating....a world that was falling apart...

suffering terribly from the malady of all the social ills of slavery, vice and war.

Important as resolutions may be--important as plans and programs may be--here was a group of people who went out to confront a world that was sick at the heart, and the only thing they had to offer wasn't a resolution--wasn't a recommendation--no single type program--no new system....the only thing they had to offer was fransformed men and women--men captivated by the Spirit of God--men on fire with God--who went out to confront a world that was dying....with the hope of Jesus Christ. All the schemes and the plans and the programs and the recommendations and the systems came later, but before those things could happen, you had to have a transformed individual.

It may be of some interest to you to know that before all the staff in Saint Luke Church separate for their summer vacations, we sit down and we have a meeting and we talk about the things that we would want most for Saint Luke Church, come next year, and sometimes we're ambitious enough to think of five years from now. I can tell you, immediately, that the priority of priorities, when we sit down to dream and plan for Saint Luke Church, will not lie primarily in a program--some new order--some additional service....but the priority of priorities will be this: How can it be possible that, whenever people of Saint Luke Church come together, they will be completely obsessed with the notion that they are there together in the name of Jesus Christ....to think--to worship--to act--to do anything and everything according to the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

It means, in substance, that what we hope for and pray for Saint Luke Church will be, repeatedly, that every Sunday will be a kind of Pentecost... ..and every Sunday School class-room will be a session conducted by a person who has been baptized by the Holy Spirit....that every time a choir rehersal is held and is conducted, it is done in the Spirit of Jesus Christ... ...that every time a Workers' Conference is being conducted in Saint Luke Church, it is being conducted as in the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ.

This I say to you in closing--you should know this....this morning a group of new members was received into the parish family. Whenever such a group meets for the first time, they are given to understand that our concern for them and their concern for us should be their relationship to Jesus Christ, and if they are willing to become one with us in the work and worship of Jesus Christ--then come!----getting the Lutheran label is simply incidental.

"When the day of Pentecost was fully come they were <u>there</u> with one accord...."..and the miracle happened. O God, do it again----here!

"PLEASING GOD"

The sermon for this special Confirmation service is entitled, "On Pleasing God." The text is the 14th verse of the 19th Psalm:

> "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer."

'On Pleasing God'---Is it possible to please God? God, you know, is perfect--there isn't anything that God cannot do, and, when God does it, it is always done perfectly, wisely and exceedingly well. Is it possible to please God?

Tonight, on this special Confirmation service, perhaps you might be thinking very quickly about the kind of remark that people sometimes make. You have heard people say....adults, now...."I'd never want to work for that man....He's too perfect....No one could ever please him!"

I have heard people say, sometimes, "I don't know why she ever got married to him....He's too perfect....She'll never be able to please him!"

And sometimes there are college students who say, "You'd never catch me taking a course under Professor So-and-So....He's too perfect....No one.. ..no student....can ever please him....No matter how hard you may work, you'll never come up with the type of thing for which he will give you a word of praise!"

The other evening....well, one of you in the Confirmation Class, you have several brothers who serve in the military....one of your brothers stopped by the parsonage and he was telling about life in the Air Force. And, as we sat around the table in the parsonage kitchen, he began telling about how, when he got up in the morning until he went to bed at night--the whole day was set about trying to please the commanding officer, and when there would be one inspection after another--you simply had to please him, and if you did not please him, well, it was just too bad. In fact, this young man said that it seemed to be the business of the army to make the enlisted man please the commanding officer and to make sure that everything

was done as it should be done.

Tonight, you're enlisting in the Army of the Lord. Tonight, you're saying, in the presence of all the people who are here, that you want Jesus Christ to be your Lord and your Master. Tonight, this is what you are doing....you're saying that you want to serve God all the days of your life.

Now, I ask you--is it possible to please God?....If we are to serve Him, can we please Him?....He, who is perfect? The words of the text serve as a good answer. Here is a man who is talking about pleasing God, and the thing that he wants most from life is that he should do the thing that is acceptable with God...."Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer".... here is a man whose heart's desire is to please God....even though God may be perfect, he still wants to use his life as an attempt to do the things that will be acceptable with Him.

Whenever you have a lord and a master, it becomes your business to please that person. How can one please God? The psalmist begins in this way: "Why, with the words that I speak--let the words of my mouth be acceptable in thy sight."

Has it occurred to you that God is the one who hears everything!.... God is the one who sees everything!...God is the one who knows everything! ....Now, here is a man who says of God, "Let every word that I speak---let the words of my mouth---be acceptable in your sight."

Why should words be so important? What difference does it make what a man says? Don't people say it's what a man does that's important? Just speaking a word--could it be as important as all that? If you are to please God, maybe you should begin at that point, however--with the word that you are going to speak with your mouth--for the simple reason that it can be said that words become the window to a soul. As you hear people speak, you can learn very easily what they're thinking, and the kind of person they actually are.

I should let you in on a little secret, I suppose--I didn't take unfair advantage of you--on this trip that we took to Gettysburg and to Baltimore....this all-day caravan of the class....I had the good fortune to have several of you riding with me. All I had to do, as I rode along, was just to keep quiet and, as you spoke, I learned more about you in one day, perhaps, than I learned about you in an entire year of Confirmation Class instruction.

Now, that's the way it is with life--people are always listening to what we say--and who doesn't give himself to talking very easily? Now, God can hear everything and if, when we speak, we give some kind of an index to our character, here is the psalmist who says, "O God, I don't want to take a chance on anything--let every word that I speak be acceptable in your sight."

Words are terribly important. I know some people who've said that their lives have been changed because someone went out of their way to speak to them. There are some people who have come back to St. Luke Church and have become members of this church because, once, when they came as strangers, someone,...it might have been the person sitting in the same pew.. ...it might have been someone standing in the narthex....it might have been an usher....at any rate, someone went out of their way to say something to them, kind and gracious, and they said that their relationship in Saint Luke Church had made a tremendous difference in their lives---and it all began with someone saying something to them.

I know a young man who became a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ because one day, when he was walking down the steps in his high school, he happened to meet a man who stopped to talk to him and said, "Have you ever thought about the ministry?....Did you ever think that you might want to become a pastor?"....and from that moment on, that young man started thinking very seriously about the ministry!

Words are very, very important. They can change people's lives. In fact, some of us think words are so important that we give ourselves to

preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ....dealing with words, Sunday by Sunday, trying to give people some picture of God by the words that we use.

Here was the psalmist who said, "I'd like to please God, and I think I'd like to begin to please Him by just the words that I speak with my mouth---'Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart'----the meditation of my heart?----can you tell what another man is thinking? Can you tell, when a person remains silent, sometimes, what is going on down deep inside his heart? Sometimes you cannot tell, but God can! God can see everything and God can read what's written on the inner lining of a man's heart--and what is in a man's heart is terribly important to God because....even the Bible says, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life"....as a man thinks, so he becomes.

Here is something very unpleasant that I am going to tell you, and I am sorry that I have to tell it to you....but, some years ago, there was a man who went out of life by using the back door--that is, life became so difficult for him and unpleasant and ugly, that he no longer wanted to live, and so he thought he would bring it to an end. When people came to his room to make an investigation as to why this life should crack up like this, they found filthy literature in his room--ugly and obscene pictures....now, here was a man who, silently, in his own heart, was thinking upon ugly and cheap things....and sooner or later, for a person, life like that brings a great burden that causes him to break. People on the outside didn't know what he was thinking, but all along the line he was feeding his mind and his heart upon the evil and the cheap things in life.

Here is a man, the psalmist, who says, "Let the words of my mouth---- let the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight....O God, let everything that I think--you can see everything!".....Let that stand the test of God Himself.

Now, here's something that bothers me a bit---it says nothing in here about the way I live--the things I do. Every Sunday, when you come to church,

you hear something about asking God to forgive us for the words we say, the thoughts we think, the things we do...."we have sinned against God by thought, word and deed"....but here in this text, there's nothing at all about the things that a man will do...."Let the words of my mouth--let the meditation of my heart"....nothing about the things that I do..."Let my every-day deeds be acceptable in your sight---".

I thought, for a while, that must be an omission--the psalmist had forgotten something--and then it occurred to me....why, it isn't necessary to have mentioned that at all. It isn't at all important to talk about the things that you are going to do, because....if a man's words will please God....and if the thoughts of a man's heart will please God....then what he is going to do will please God.

You become the kind of person you say you are....you become the kind of person you think you are. Be careful what you say, my friend....you might become that kind of person. Be careful what you think....you might become that kind of person. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight....O God, I want to please you---I want to please you this way."

Now, the last part of the text is also important----"...O Lord, my strength and my redeemer."...."I can't please you, God, perfectly--I know that--but therefore, I look to you to be my strength and I look to you to be my redeemer....my helper." If the man who will begin and make the attempt to please God, God, Himself, steps in and becomes his strength and will help him, but if you want God to help you, you must be the kind of person that God can help and God will want to help.

If you say the right words, if you think the right thoughts, if these are pleasing to God....then, rest assured that God Himself will help you. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer."

"... Until she breathed her last, she would not have done with her gratitude to God for sending this dedicated man to be an influence for good on those dear to her." ... "Thoughts on the Sermon"

May 31, 1959

"GOD IS LOVE"

The sermon is entitled by the words of the text, which is a portion of the 16th verse of the 4th chapter of the First Epistle General of John....."God is love."

Now, where do you suppose the writer got that idea? I should tell you at once that this is the perfect way to describe God. Once this is said, nothing else need be said. Three words--this is the whole story about God--God is love. Where did he get the notion?

This idea of God, as it appears on a page in the New Testament, is not entirely new. If you read the pages of the Old Testament, you will be introduced to this concept of God as love, but it isn't quite the same when it's written in the Old Testament as when it's written in the New. The Old Teatament fathers had the notion about God being a God of love, but they qualified God as a God of love--God was loving those who were behaving. "If you behave, I will love you"....."If you are good, I will honor you"....."If you misbehave, I will punish you"---this is the God of love as He appears on the pages of the Old Testament--a conditional love---"I will love you as long as you are good."

So men read the pages of the Old Testament, and so they believed in this kind of love in the mind and heart of God. But there's a world of difference in this concept and the New Testament---three words---God is love.

What kind of love is this God? Let us think about it....let us understand it as best we can, for as we understand this concept of God, we shall know as best we can all that man can know about the basic character of God. I do not have to tell you that there is no word in human speech more clouded in mystery than the word 'God.' That's understandable, because man is finite and God is infinite.....man is human and God is divine. None of us can fully understand even the mind of God when

God reveals Himself to us.

And so men have gone asking the question from one generation to another---"What is God like?" And they sought to answer it....and you and I are not the first to ask the question, nor shall we be the last, but of all people, we can be considered fortunate, for we can get the perfect answer---'God is Love.'

'God is Love?'.....Is that the way you'd describe God? Why was it that the writer did not say...."God is justice"...."God is beauty"..... ...."God is power"...."God is strength"...."God is truth?" The writer says, "God is Love," and I'll tell you where he got the idea.

I am numbered among those who believe that the writer of this Epistle is the one man on the face of this earth who got to be nearest Jesus Christ as a man---the beloved Disciple John,--who, because of his temperament and his nature, received the title as the Beloved Disciple, and as John came to understand the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ, he had only one word for Him---a four-lettered word---Love.

As he observed Him---by every sermon that He preached...He preached because He loved people and He wanted people to come to understand the truth of God; every miracle that He performed...He performed because He loved people and wanted people to benefit from the power of God, that even by the power of God, a particular need in people's lives could be met; when He called people to be His disciples...He called them because He loved them and He wanted to share with them the very heart of God---John, the Beloved Disciple, remembers the life of Jesus Christ and there is only one word that he can use to describe it---Love---this is a life of love. That's why it's the Apostle John who says, "No man has seen God at any time; but His Son, Jesus Christ, whom we know--He has revealed Him," and he could truthfully say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

I suppose it's safe to assume that no idea ever means much to us until we see it spelled out in human nature--until we see it dramatized in front of us by people. One day upon the face of the earth there came a Man who, when He lived and when He died, did everything because He loved people....and after He had run His course, men said, "This is God." That's why the poet could write, "Love all lovely, Love Divine; Love came down at Christmas-time!" Jesus, God in the flesh, is the personification of love---and this is God!

I am tremendously impressed by the fact that, when you look at these three words....'God is love'....you must say to yourself, from this point onward, "As a Christian, I must recognize the truth---that there can be no such thing as a loveless God---nor can there be such a thing as a God-less love." You cannot think of love without thinking of God--you cannot think of God without thinking of love--God is Love....Love is God.

Now, why don't we ask the next question---what kind of love is God? There is no word in our language, I suppose, that's more abused and misused than the word 'love.' That word 'love' can mean almost anything to anyone at any time. What must it mean when we think of God as love?

I would begin at this point....when one thinks of God as Love, he must see a love that is always taking the initiative in behalf of someone else--God came to us--we do not go to Him. "God so loved the world that He gave....."....God so loved the world that He came from Heaven to us!

In our relationship with other people even, when we use the word 'love' we are inclined to become passive--to wait in the shadow--to say, "What more should I do?"....I've done this already--it's too much to expect of any person...."I think I'll just wait for a while." This God whom we know in Jesus Christ, is the God who is always taking the initiative to come to us. He never completely washes His hands of us...He will never ignore us....He was always, <u>always</u> coming. This God who is

Love, is possessed by a love that takes the initiative in behalf of other people. Love is forever positive!

The second thing to be said about this love which is God is that it is open-hearted. This love that God has is a love that's for everyone. Everyone! How foolish we are! We have blinders on our eyes, sometimes, when we come to Saint Luke Church---Oh quite unwittingly---we get into a mood, perhaps, where we think we are the only people that have a claim on God's love in this particular place at this particular time....but God beholds with a favorable eye all the groups of mankind, wherever they may be. To be perfectly certain, He sees us here and He is mindful of our need and our condition, but never at the expense of anybody else. This God's heart is a heart that's big enough for everyone.

I sometimes sit in my study and I say to myself, "Now, if you were to make a prayer right now, what is the thing for which you would ask God most?"....and I've been obsessed by this recently and I share it with you...."O God, give me a heart big enough to make room for everyone that I meet!"...."O God, give me a heart big enough to make room for <u>everyone</u> that I meet!"---so strangely different from the kind of love that you and I usually express. We do make room for those whom we particularly like....we do make room for those who are kind and gracious to us....but to make room for <u>everyone</u>!

When one remembers what the love of God is like--this love that's always operative in behalf of my need, regardless of my color, my condition, my creed, my intelligence--my lack of it....."O God, give me a heart big enough to make room for everyone that I meet." This was the kind of love expressed by Jesus Christ---He never pushed anyone to the periphery. "He drew a circle that shut me out; but love and I had the wit to win--We drew a circle that took Him in."

The third thing that one must say about this love which is God--it was a love that was willing to sacrifice. You cannot tell the story of

Jesus Christ without including the Cross....You cannot tell the story of Jesus Christ and simply talk about a preacher and about a very kind and gracious person who enjoyed talking with people....and about someone who performed miracles---this is not the complete story of Jesus Christ---the complete story of Jesus Christ includes the chapter called, "Crucifixion"...and crucifixion is the paying of one's complete life sacrificially.

I hang my head in shame, when I think that I could....I wouldn't even need the fingers on one hand to number the people in this world who have been benefitted by my life because I sacrificed something for them. Maybe you could say the same thing. Any number of people who might be a little better off because we've been decent to them....because we've been kind to them....because we've been gracious to them----but where is the person who is nearer the true blessing that God intends for that soul because you or I had a love for that person that sacrificed?

God is Love. The love that we know in God through Jesus Christ was that kind of love.

I am willing to believe that, while this world has so much of everything....think of that for a moment....in the scientific world--it's absolutely amazing the progress that we've made since World War Two came to an end--in some areas we are living in an entirely different world, so great has been the advance....In the world of diplomatic relations--no matter how often we might be brought to the brink, it's always comforting to know that there is such a thing as a conference table--that there is such a thing as the United Nations--that there is always the possibility of a meeting at the Summit--that men can go to something short of war....therein may lie our hope!....One's amazed when he thinks of the advance that's been made in medical science--that perhaps for the greater part of the suffering of the world--for the greater part of physical suffering--there is some kind of alleviation.....ponder that---we have

so much!

But there is one thing that we lack--we lack the kind of love that Jesus Christ had....and why?....because we pattern our behavior, very largely, after other people. Jesus Christ came into the world to reveal the heart of God, and, in doing that, He becomes the supreme example. So much of our loving other people is based on the way they love us...so much of our behavior pattern is determined by the way other people behave toward us. The example that we ought to have is the kind of love that was revealed in Jesus Christ.

I read with a great deal of interest, the other day, about a game that some Englishmen had been playing. Over in London, you know, they have the double-decker buses--and they resorted to this kind of thing to enjoy themselves one night....six people went out of the room and then they invited each of the people to return, one at a time, and the first man who came back was to imitate what the group had decided should be imitated; and they said, "We'll ask you to imitate, now, a conductor on a double-decker bus--climbing up the narrow stair-way, getting tickets, changing money, dealing with the customers--the passengers"---and so number one man performed this imitation...number two man came from the outer room and he was to imitate what he saw the first man imitate, and the third man to imitate what he saw the second, and the fourth, the third, and the fifth, the fourth, and the sixth, the fifth--until they came to the sixth and last man....and there was practically no similarity, whatsoever, in what the sixth man was doing, as over against what the first man had done. And the reason is obvious, my friend--each, in turn, was imitating an imitator, and the validity of the whole thing had lost something by the time it got to man number six, who was imitating man number five.

Could it be that, in this old world of ours, we are imitating the wrong people, who exemplify what might be called love? Could not the

answer come in going back to Jesus Christ himself and trying to imitate His life? That's where the Apostle John got this whole idea that God of Love. He had lived with Jesus Christ and he had only one word for the life of Christ----Love. Could that be the word that people could have for Jesus Christ, when they see you and me as a Christian?

"..... and she was obsessed with this idea - not a new one - God's love is in never-ending supply, but the soul must be conditioned for the eating"

from "Thoughts on the Human"

June 7, 1959

THE DIVIDING LINE

The sermon, based upon the Epistle for the day, is entitled, "The Dividing Line." The text is from the Epistle, the 14th verse of the third chapter of I John:

> "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death."

Tell me, my friend, how can you tell a Christian? If you were to see any number of people, which one now is the Christian? There are those who tell me that there ought never to any distinction be made. When you see people, for instance, you ought not to say, "This person is a Christian because he is distinguished by the garb that he wears." There are some denominations that frown upon their pastor wearing ecclesiastical garb--no clerical collar--because, they say, "No distinction should be made. You ought not to set yourself apart from other people."

There are some people who, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, will not build for themselves such a church as the one in which we are found because they even believe that no distinction should be given to the Christian, even as to the place in which he shall go to find God. "God," he says, "can be found anywhere and everywhere. Therefore, let us gather together in small clusters of people--without stained-glass--without an altar--without a pulpit....we shall enjoy no mark of distinction. The world, looking upon us, will not be able to tell by the physical surroundings in which we meet whether or not we are Christians."

My friend, Alexander Kurilenko, who fled out the back door of his home in Estonia as the Communists came in the front door, told me that, on occasion, representatives of the Soviet government would stand in a clandestine fashion, taking down the names of people who went to church, for, they said to themselves, "These people must be Christians--they may be enemies of the state--therefore we shall record them in such a way, because we have seen them go to church."

This is a mark of distinction, say some people. You can tell a Christian by what he wears....you can tell a Christian by the place to which he will go to worship. Some people say there should be no such distinction--that a Christian should look exactly as anybody else--there should be no dividing line.

I have not come this morning to argue the point as to whether a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ should wear whatever has been accepted as the uniform of the church. I have not come to argue the point whether or not you, as a layman, should place in your lapel a miniature cross as a token of your dedication to Jesus Christ--that men might be able to see this, even, as a sign of distinction. I have not come to argue that there should be a dividing line among people by what they wear.

But, as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, I have come to this place to remind you, this morning, that there is a dividing line amongst people--and there is a distinction to be made--and that distinction is going to be made by God Himself....and that there are people who will be given the label 'Christian' by God, Himself, as over against a group of people who will not deserve that label.

I come to you, this morning, to tell you this somber truth--that there is a dividing line and that dividing line is being drawn, not by man, but by God Himself. Distinction will be made. A man will belong to one group, as over against another group. I give this to you on good authority. When Our Blessed Lord was here on earth, He spent a great deal of His time, especially in the latter months of His ministry, telling people that some day they would have to fact God--in a final moment of judgment and, in that moment of judgment, God was going to draw a line and on one side of the line would be Heaven and on the other side of the line would be the place of the condemned. I give this to you on good authority, my friend--on the authority of Jesus Christ, Himself.

One day there was someone who remembered specifically what Jesus Christ had said along this line, and he wrote several letters to friends of his who took the Name of Christ, and one of these letters is the Epistle for today. The writer is the Beloved Apostle, John, who, perhaps more than any other earthly figure, entered into the spirit of Jesus Christ--more so than any other disciple. John, the Beloved Disciple, is writing to men and women to remind them that there is a dividing line--that there is a distinction that makes the difference between death and life....and that it's possible for a man in this world--that it's possible for a man on this earth--to know whether or not he is being saved and whether or not he can enjoy forever the blessing of the redeemed.

Again and again there are people who come to a pastor....or a Sunday School teacher....or a student of the Bible....and make this earnest inquiry--"How can I know that I am in God's elect? How can I have, in this world, the assurance that, when I die, I shall go to Heaven?" It's a very earnest inquiry, and there isn't too much that can be said for any man's religion if he hasn't found himself making such an inquiry. Maybe we can say that our religious experience is not valid until we have posed the question, "Will I be numbered in the ranks of the redeemed?---When I die, will I enjoy the blissful state of Heaven?"

The question has a right to be raised--the question deserves a good and proper answer. Because the question should be raised, God Himself has made possible the answer, and you can find it on one page after another in certain writings of the New Testament; and numbered in that category is the text for today's sermon...."We have passed from death unto life and we know it, and this is the reason why we know it--because, in our hearts, we have love for the brethren."

God is Love, and if a man abides in God, he will have love; and as he abides in God, he has love for his brethren. It is absolutely impossible to really love God and not love your brother. God wanted this

spelled out so specifically that it's Scripture...."He that saith he loves God whom he hath not seen and does not love his brother whom he hath seen, this man is a liar."....I give that to you on good authority. This is not the concoction of any one of us....this is not a judgment that you and I are making fit, now, to put upon somebody else...this is Scripture that I share with you....this is purely Biblical...."If a man says he loves God whom he hath not seen and does not love his brother whom he hath seen, this man is a liar."

The text--let me repeat it for you again--"We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." This, now, is the acid test as to whether or not a man is really Christian. It is not how much he knows....it is not how much he has....but, rather, it is what he does for his brother with what he knows and with what he has.

Do I have to tell you what you already know--that most of us find it exceedingly difficult to love people. It is more, perhaps, than a witticism, when the chap said, "The more I see people, the more I love my dog." It is exceedingly difficult for us to love some people beyond our own acquaintance--beyond our own circle. It is exceedingly difficult for us to love people whom we have not seen fit to choose as our friends. While this is a text that deals with a dividing line, it does not allow any of us the liberty of making a dividing line among the people that we are going to love. God is Love---period. And if a man is to know God's love, then, in God's spirit, he, too, must love---period.

There is no such thing as selectivity in Christian compassion. God did not practice it. Oh, we put blinders on our eyes, sometimes, when we think, because we are Americans, that we have a particular spot in God's heart. We think, sometimes, because we have taken the name of Christian, that God loves us a little more than He loves someone else. I'm not so certain, my friend---I'm not so certain! If I know anything

at all about the mind and the heart of God, I cannot see how He deals in degrees--that He will ever give me more of His heart than He gives to somebody else. I may allow myself to be in a position where I can appropriate more, but that _____ lies in me and not in God. God is Love---period. If I am to love God, then I am to love---period.

It's an easy thing for a man to say that he loves God...God's remote. God's high and lifted up. I can adore Him because God's adorable...but I know very well, on the basis of what insight I have into my own heart and into yours, that, if a certain type of person, quite unattractive, quite unlikely, should come and sit in the very same seat with you this morning....a particular kind of person....you could squirm a bit--you would be irritated--you would be very uncomfortable. It is not an easy thing to love <u>everyone</u>....a very easy thing to love <u>someone</u>--and to select!.

But to love <u>everyone?</u>....'to love the Afrikaner?....to love the smelly South-Sea Islander?....to love the uncouth Indian?'....I am quoting, my friend--I have no right to use these labels--I am quoting...to love these people? But this is the dividing line. This is how God knows whether or not we really love Him....we pass from death unto life and you can know it, if, in your heart, you have love for the brethren.

Now, what is it to love? To love is not to hate. Let's deal with the negatives, first of all. If you do not hate someone, you may rest assured that you're well on the road to loving him. You cannot possibly love someone and hate him at the same time. So, therefore, to love is not to hate.

You cannot possibly love someone and hurt him at the same time, deliberately, and so, therefore, dealing in the negative, to love is not to hurt.

To love, on the other hand, is to help--to help--to make it your business to see that the man's burden is lifted....to make it your business

to see that your fellow-man is enjoying a little bit more of the things that he did not enjoy until you came into his life---to help him, in an activated sense. To love is ano simply to ignore a man's need, but to love is, in a positive fashion, to go to that man and to say, "This I will do for you."

I take my hat off to certain representatives of Middle-Eastern governments who were bold enough and brave enough to say to the gov-or the representatives of our government, "While we may be in need, and while we are dependent upon what you and you alone, of all the peoples of the face of the earth are in a position to give to us--this we are willing to accept, if you give it to us out of sheer beneficience, and once we take it, we will not guarantee to you at all that we shall follow a particular propoganda or political line." To give--to help...To love....for one reason and one reason alone--because the person is in need--this is a sure sign of a Christian.

Because this should be as practical as it can be for everyone of us, let me give this to you for what it may be worth....fresh in my memory is a woman who had received so much hurt in life, physically,.. one misfortune after another....she did have a circle of friends...and once she confided in me and said it almost caused her to cry out in bitterness, of any number of people who would come to her and see her plight, and who would say, "Now, if there is anything that I can do for you, please let me know." She said frankly, and I quote her words, "I am so sick and tired of having people say in a condescending fashion and almost hesitate hanging up on the telephone, lest there might be the slightest imtimation of something that could be done---'Now if there's anything that I can do for you, let me know,'"---but she said, "What has brought me greatest joy is several of my friends who have never asked, but, having been made sensitive and aware of something that I have needed, have brought it and put it in front of me."

And there it is. As you and I run our course through life, we cannot help but find ourselves in the midst of crying need, but sometimes that need never claims our compassion, because no one ever asks us to do something; but there is the crowning glory of Christian love which, once it sees a man, looks at him long enough to ascertain what his need may be, and then he makes it his business to give it.

"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we have loved....." Prescription, my friend: If your life is growing sour.... if you're becoming morbid....if youre suffering from one depression after another....if you want to make all the difference in the world.... if you want to pass from shadow into sunshine--yea, verily--from death unto life....begin loving.....begin loving.

" And her prayer was - God, make me more sensitive to the needs of others, that my own heart may be purged of any selfish desires ... from thoughts on the human "

June 21, 1959

....."AS YOUR FATHER .."

The sermon is based upon the Gospel lesson for the day. It bears the title, "As Your Father." These are words from the text itself. The text is the 36th verse of the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

> "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

One meets such interesting people as he goes through life, and especially if they find out that you're interested in religion. And if the friend that you meet may not be as interested in religion as you may be, especially in an organized sense--suppose he is a free-lance chap--he might say to you, "Well I'm not so sure that churches are necessary. I don't think that we ought to have any organized religion whatsoever. If people would simply take the Bible and read it for themselves and then live by it, that's all we really need."

"Now, I'm a Sermon-on-the-Mount chap--I believe in the Sermon on the Mount--in fact, I think that's all that a man really needs...let him read the Sermon on the Mount each day and live by it and this whole world itself, in due process of time, may become a veritable heaven on earth!"

One meets such interesting people. One has met people just like that. Why not stay a little longer with them and say to them..."Well, just what's in the Sermon on the Mount?...Would you mind telling me?"... ...(this might be hitting a bit below the belt)..."Just what's in the Sermon on the Mount?"....and then as they stumble and falter a bit--they might come up with this passage or that passage--suppose they came up with this one..."Be merciful as your Father also is merciful,"...and then you might say to that person, "Well, if you believe in the Sermon on the Mount, what is this thing in which you believe--what do those words mean?"

Now, think twice before you put that question to him, because he might put that question to you and, if he should, how would you answer it?

As often as I have read the Sermon on the Mount, and as frequently as I have preached upon it, I'm not so sure that I would have chosen this text a year ago--as I planned the sermon schedule for a year in advance--that I would have stuck with this text for today. For, the more I read it and try to enter into its meaning, the greater difficulty I experience..."Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful."

When I seek to enter into the meaning of these words, I am struck by the fact that here are two things that I cannot escape...One--Jesus Christ is suggesting for me a pattern for behavior which is well-nigh impossible--to be merciful as God is merciful--to be as good as Jesus Christ--and if this should cause me some difficulty, what would happen, had I chosen the parallel text from the Gospel of Matthew, for Matthew puts this same thought in this manner: "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father is perfect."

Now, if a man wants to say he believes in the Sermon on the Mount and if he says he believes in these words, he had better enter into some kind of an understanding as to what these words mean, and that's specifically the purpose of this sermon this morning--that, under God, it could be as helpful to you as the preparation of this sermon has been to me.

I am struck, first of all, by the fact that in these words, "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father is merciful," Jesus Christ is asking me to attempt the impossible--to take as my pattern the pattern of God Himself!

And, in the second place, I am struck by the fact that, in this text, Jesus Christ does not give me an alternative--He does not say

to me, "Well now, let's see....there are any number of possible choices that you can make--here's one of them--here's another--here's a third one, a fourth and a fifth--you think them over and if, as a Christian, this is the one you want to take, well that's the one for you."...He doesn't talk that way. There is no possibility here of any number of choices--there is no alternative whatsoever--this is a directive--and this is the second thing that puzzles me....in the first place, Jesus Christ is suggesting that I be as perfect or be as merciful as God is merciful....and, in the second place, He is issuing it as a directive! ...."Be merciful!"...."This is the only choice I give you."

Now, when you come to something like this, what do you do with it? Well, it's comforting to go back and read some earlier verses--and this I suggest always when we read the Bible--always keep the text within the context. Remember that when you go quoting your friend and neighbor as well--never give your friend and neighbor the last statement that was made in a conversation--always give them the benefit of all that went before the statement was made.

Now, one is impressed by the fact that Jesus Christ, when He spoke these words, spoke earlier in this way, "But I say unto you,, which hear"....Jesus Christ is saying, "This is what I'm telling you people who can hear what I have to say--this is what I'm saying to you people who listen to me!"

Any school teacher knows that, when he stands up to teach, not everyone's listening--oh, they're in the same classroom and they may be looking in the same direction, but not everyone hears.

Any wife knows that....she may go on and speak at length to her husband as he is about to leave for the office and say any number of things to him, but he doesn't always hear.

Parents know that when they deal with their children. They are about to leave the house--they make certain suggestions as to how

the children should behave until they should come back--they don't always hear.

Jesus Christ is saying, on this instance, "This is what I'm saying to you people who have a way of hearing me." And who is the person that hears Jesus Christ?....a person who wants to hear Him....A person who is willing to identify himself with the Spokesman...A person who is kin to the type of thing that's being discussed.

Now, Jesus Christ is saying these words--the words that constitute the text--to people who are willing to take Him seriously..."You people who hear Me--who take Me seriously....Now if you want to take Me seriously, I'm telling you two things--listen to My directive---- be merciful, and be merciful to the same degree that your Heavenly Father is merciful with you."

Now the thing begins to make a little sense to me. These words, spoken by Jesus Christ, were not meant specifically for everyone---- only to people who take Him seriously will they make any sense at all. ..."Be merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

One of the crowning attributes about God is that He is good and deals graciously with His children. This is the thing that Jesus understood perfectly--God deals graciously with His children--God is out-going to them with love....and, that men should better understand that, He uses a descriptive, and He says it's 'like a father.'

Now, this is not a figure of speech that's strange to the Old or to the New Testament...."Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him"...."Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father is merciful"...."When ye pray, say....use this word for God, when you come to Him in prayer--call Him 'Father.'"

It seems to me that every time Jesus chose that word 'Father' when He thought of God, He paid Joseph a lovely compliment. By the

way, play this little game sometime....of all the characters in the Bible, who, among them, would you like very much some day to meet? Had you lived in Bible days, which one of these men or women would you like very much to have met? I'll tell you without hesitation this morning--I should like so much to have met Joseph. Why? Only one reason today--because I am remembering that, again and again, when Jesus thought of God, the word that He invariably reached for was 'Father.' Could it be that somehow, in the life of Joseph, there wasn't a single thing that was untoward, unkind, unsatisfactory--that He could so easily use the word 'Father' when He thought of God?

There's one father, like whom I hope I may never become, and oddly enough, it's the father of Martin Luther. I've read some of the biographies of Luther, and somewhere I was given to understand that Luther had a peculiar shudder in his soul, when he prayed the Lord's Prayer because, when he used the term 'Father,' he had unpleasant memories of his association with Hans Luther. his own father. His father was cruel, so he thought....his father was unkind....his father was so seldom gracious. Think of it!....that when a man should think of God, and he should use the word 'Father,' a cold shudder should come over his soul because his own father did not represent such truth.

Take the finest and the noblest in a father, and then magnify it a hundred times over and more, and that's what God's like. Now, if we are to be merciful as a father is merciful--how is a father merciful? A good father, a true father, is one who deals graciously with all of his children and, as all of us know, one child can be as different from another as day is from night. As all of us know, some children have a way of responding to parental influence and some children just don't respond. Some children have broken their parents' hearts--some children have brought them great joy....there are some parents who can do almost anything with their children for good--and there are some

parents who have to depend upon other people to influence for their children for good.

But what does this mean to the father--a good father--does he allow himself to lean very easily in the direction of the one who responds? No. A good father treats them alike and is as merciful and as kind and gracious towards the one as he is toward the other.

You may not want to believe this and maybe you would wish that I did not say it, but I have long since satisfied my mind that it's extremely risky business for anyone to believe that God has favorites. Some of us might be in a position where we can better avail ourselves of what God has to offer, but I'm not so sure that God comes to me more often than He comes to somebody else....I'm not so sure that God gives me an advantage, deliberately, at the expense of somebody else. God is merciful....period. And He is merciful to all and to all alike. Why? Because He is being true to the nature of God and God makes it His business, if you'll let me put it this way, to never be less than God.

Now, it seems to me that a father should be on the same basis. He should make it his business to never be less than a father to anyone who is privileged to call him father. That's why this text begins to make sense to me now--when Jesus Christ issues the directive--"You be merciful....as a father....make it your business to be merciful."

There is such a thing as falling in love, but there is also such a thing as keeping oneself in love. Only a fool would believe that he had to look only once into the eyes of a maiden and say to her, "I love you," and then everything would be cared for automatically from that point on. To keep oneself in love, one must decide that that's the kind of a person he's going to be. And if one's going to be merciful, one becomes a merciful person because it's a matter of will and choice and deliberate action.

"Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father is merciful." The unfortunate thing for most of us in our Christian experience is this---that we foolishly think that we just become naturally good ....that, somehow, just coming to church has a way of making us immune to certain things....that, somehow, just getting on our knees and making a prayer surrounds us with a cloak of armor that will keep us from the fiery darts of the devil.

Again and again it has been said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind." Somewhere in the development of Christian personality, a man has to decide that he's going to take as a standard and as his pattern the standard of God Himself. If your life and my life--if our lives together are not nearly as gracious as they should be, and if we are keeping from life the mercy that life needs most, it could be that some of us have yet to decide that, whatever else we will become, this we most certainly want to become--a gracious, merciful, forgiving person.

I'd do it my friend, and I'm speaking to myself as well--before it is too late--for there is a passage of scripture that reads like this....'If you do not forgive--if you are not merciful--how can you expect God to forgive you?'

"..... and we are so often impelled by directions, even it we, even when our very being cries out against it...."

from "Thoughts on the Sermon"

June 28, 1959

"NEVERTHELESS"

The sermon is based upon the Gospel lesson for the day. It bears the title, "Nevertheless," and the text is the 5th verse of the 5th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

> "And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net."

The time had come when Our Blessed Lord felt no longer perfectly free to preach in the synagogue. He had made up His mind that now He would preach to people wherever He found them, and the most likely thing upon which His eye should fall could be turned into a pulpit.

That's what happened on this occasion. By the shore of the Lake of Galilee, He found an empty boat. He laid hold upon it, took permission and was preaching. After He was finished preaching, He made a suggestion to certain fishermen who were nearby.

Now, had you and I been there at this time, we might have chuckled a bit to ourselves, for chances are that they listened very intently while He was preaching His sermon. When He talked to them about God and the purposes of God....when He might have talked to them about prayer and spiritual things....no doubt they listened quite intently. But when the Preacher finished preaching and when He turned to Simon Peter and made a suggestion to him about catching fish, Simon Peter, for the moment, gave Him a rather hard time...."Stick to your preaching, Preacher--stay in your pulpit--don't you concern yourself with my business."

Now, that's the way it might have occurred to us, had we been there, because most certainly this was actually true. Jesus had finished preaching His sermon and then He told Simon Peter that he ought to go out into the lake and try again to get a haul of fish. And it is at this point that Simon Peter turns upon the Preacher.

Now we only have a part of this in the text. All that transpired

is not recorded, and I'm reasonably certain that Peter must have said to Him, "You don't understand, Jesus. We have been out there all night, and that's the time to go fishing, and if you can't catch fish in the night--we who know this place--you haven't a chance at all to catch fish in the daytime." And if Peter would have had his way, he would have stopped at that point, implying, of course, that Jesus didn't know a thing about catching fish, and He had better stick to His preaching.

But there's a change takes place in Peter--there's the injection of a very significant word--something begins to hang, now, in the balance, when a man introduces a specific word into his vocabulary------ ---'nevertheless'---. "Master, we have toiled all the night--we haven't taken anything....nevertheless....at your word--I will let down the net."

Now in my Bible at home and even in this pulpit Bible in front of me, there's a title for this specific passage--let me read it for you, these four words-"Miraculous Draught of Fishes." I'm not so sure that they do us a good service when they use that title for this passage of scripture. Maybe it's indicative of the fact that whenever we think of this incident, we think about the big haul of fishes.

Now. if I understand this passage aright, and if I understand how God deals with men, this is not the important thing--that once upon a time at a certain place, a certain group of men went out and caught so many fish that their nets began to break and their ships began to sink. Jesus did not come into the world particularly to show men how to catch fish. The significant thing, as far as I am concerned, is the fact that here is one man, confronted by a suggestion of Jesus Christ, who is willing to change his mind.

This is the miracle of miracles--not that there should be a great haul of fish----the miracle of miracles lies in the fact that

plain, ordinary, stubborn human nature is willing to say 'nevertheless' to God and to say, "God, I'll try your way." This is precisely what happened. So, if I were to write a caption, I wouldn't put at the head of my passage here, "Miraculous Draught of Fishes"....I think I'd be inclined to pencil in, "Peter Changes His Mind at the Suggestion of Jesus Christ."

Now, let me ask you this question....why? After all, Peter was a fisherman. I suppose, to the end of time, when people think about Peter, they will invariably use these words--'The Big Fisherman.' That's all he ever knew until he met Jesus Christ. And when Jesus Christ suggested that he do this thing, he could tell Him all the reasons why, in his judgement, it ought not be done...."You can't catch fish in the daytime--we've already tried all night--it won't work"---..but Peter changed his mind...Why? Why this one word--'nevertheless?'

I think I know the reason....confronted by Jesus Christ, he had to respect the authority of Christ. There is something about Jesus Christ that made him want to follow His suggestion. Let's put it this way...maybe it did not seem sensible to Peter, but somehow it seemed sensible to Jesus, and that was enough for Peter. If it did not make sense to him, yet made sense to Jesus, he was willing to try the suggestion that Jesus made, This is the balance point--this is where the thing hinges--as soon as it began to make sense to Peter that it made sense to Jesus--Peter says...."nevertheless"...."I'll try."

Now I tell you this morning, my friend, that, for most of us, that's the point at which we must begin with God. Somewhere, we must recognize the fact that, while what He suggests may not be sensible to us, but if it's sensible to Him, it's worth trying. And we'll never get very far with God's way until we're willing to accept it, because, while it doesn't make sense to us, we are willing to accept the fact that it makes sense to Him. And once you reach that point, you've al-

ready established the ground-work for the performance of a miracle... "nevertheless"...."I will try it."

Now, it seems reasonable to me that Peter was willing to try again for another reason....what was there to lose? I hesitate to put it to you on this basis--what is there to lose, now?--we had tried--- let me try it once more....it's worth trying just because I may not have anything to lose.'

When we read biographies, many of us are impressed by the fact that some people have arrived only because, again and again, thev tried once more. How many times did Abraham Lincoln try for public office until he became successful? Again and again, in the lives of any number of men who have arrived, there is chapter after chapter that can be entitled, "Once More"....."Once More"....

I cannot remember the author, nor can I remember the correct title of the book, but it's the account of a man who went as a prospector looking for gold. He tried again and again, and then suddenly, in the face of constant failure and frustration, he struck his pick into the side of the hill of wherever it was and walked away.

Some time later, another company of prospectors came and they saw, --by this time the old rusty pick--and with some degree of force, they pulled it aside, only to find the yield of precious ore. If only 'once more' the effort had been made.

This is the story of Simon Peter, who was willing to try 'once more'....."Even though we have tried again and again--nevertheless-- I will try once more."

It's also equally interesting to note that, chances are, Jesus Christ did not say, "Simon Peter--why don't you try over in this part of the lake?" We have no reason to believe that Christ spoke that way. In all liklihood, He said, "Go back to the same place." Time and again, Jesus Christ will instruct us, when we are to try again, to go back to

the same place.

Now, you and I, invariably, could give Him any number of reasons why we ought not to go back to the same place. We might be willing to try again--"but, oh God....not back there!"....and yet that may be the very directive that Jesus Christ offers. And over against that He's waiting for us to include in our vocabulary the word--'nevertheless.'...."Even though it's trying again and back at the same place----nevertheless--at your word, we'll do it."

I have been here long enough, I think, to know that when I scan this congregation on a Sunday morning, maybe a total of--a portion, perhaps, as small--of the entire total of the congregation, less than ½ of 1% of you, might come here eagerly, asking God to give you some power and sense of direction for tomorrow morning...and if you had your way, you'd never again want to go back to the place that you left on Friday night. But it could be in the plan and the scheme of God, He'd want you to go back right there--to the same boss--to the same working conditions....back to the same neighborhood....back to the same impossible people...."Go back and try again."

It can be said that, if a man cannot be a Christian where he is, maybe he can't be much of a Christian anywhere else. Perhaps the point at which to begin is always where you are or where you just came from. This is the miracle, you see--that Simon Peter, knowing all the reasons why, in his judgement, it ought not to be done, he was willing to say, 'nevertheless.'

This isn't so much the parable of the Sea of Galilee as it is the parable of the Sea of Life that you and I must face constantly. Now, in all fairness to ourselves, we have known people who have tried, again and again, and have not succeeded, and it can be that they have tried again and again in the wrong place and for the wrong reason.... and this I would offer as a word of caution--when any man begins to

try again, he ought always to try again because it's the suggestion of Jesus Christ, the Lord and Giver of Life. Simon Peter went back for only one reason--because Jesus Christ suggested it.

For you and for me, my friend, when we may be constrained to try again, may we try again because it's a suggestion of Jesus Christ. If we become weary and disappointed and disillusioned, and hesitate to try again because our judgement dictates...if we do try again....why not try again because it's the suggestion of Jesus Christ?

You've heard me say, again and again, that every passage of scripture, like every sermon, becomes autobiographical. I like to think that Simon Peter kept telling this account of the miraculous draught of fishes again and again because, he said, "You know, it was just like my life....I wasn't getting very far with my life--I felt so terribly unproductive--I felt as though nothing was counting for anything worthwhile, until, one day, I met Jesus Christ....and then I began taking orders from Him and now I feel a transformation has taken place--life now has taken on richer and deeper meaning....and I feel that even the yield of life itself is more significant."

That could be true for you as it could be true for me. Maybe the word that we need most to introduce in our Christian vocabulary, at this point, is that word--'nevertheless.' I'll tell you one thing---it was only when Simon Peter used it that the ground-work for a miracle was laid....."Master, we've toiled all the night--we've taken nothing--nevertheless--at your word....."

"....yes--go back, and to the same place--for surely, if the suggestion is from Jesus Christ, not only is there nothing to lose.... there is no other way...." from "Thoughts on the Sermon"

July 5, 1959

GOD BLESS AMERICA

The text consists of two verses of Psalm 67:

> "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us;
> That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations."

I am very much aware of the fact that when I stand in the pulpit in Saint Luke Church today, I am standing here on the fifth of July, which is the day after the day which marks the independence of our country. In preparation for this sermon, a bit of back-ground material was the reading of the Declaration of Independence, and I would suggest to you that you make it required reading for yourselves as well. No holiday such as this one, fraught with so great significance for our land, should ever pass without the reading of the Declaration of Independence.

What was it that these men had in mind? Why should they give expression to their feelings? Man is born to be free. When God made him, God made him that way, and soon or late, it becomes the history of any people that they should declare for their freedom. It had to happen as it happened back on July 4, 1776--it was the very nature of the thing.

When they resolved their thinking to a point, they enunciated the things that they felt were not right and proper--that spoke against the free nature of man. And as they made one charge after another against the tyrant, then they brought their resolution to a close. The last paragraph of the Declaration of Independence bears very careful reading--this is the punctuation mark. After they had said everything that they wanted to say, and just before they affixed their signatures, this, now, is their closing paragraph and I quote only a part of it "....with firm reliance upon the protection of Divine Providence, we therefore pledge to one another....." and then they bring it to a close.

The significant thing is that when they were drawing up the Declaration of Independence, God loomed upon the horizon of their thoughts.

While man is born to be free, and while it's a noble thing that any man, in behalf of his fellow-men should say, "We were never meant for the tyrant's clutch....we therefore purpose and we therefore plan....we shall have a government of our own"----this is wonderful--that the spirit of man should be so expressed---but exceedingly more wonderful is the fact that man, in his desire to be free, would admit that, try as he would, his dream would not become a reality without the assistance of God.

And that's why, in my book at least, among all the documents framed by the mind of man, this Declaration of Independence will remain classic. One reason, of course, will always be this--a noble instrument from the mind of man and always including a place for God...."This we purpose, but we know the dream becomes a reality only if God will bless us and God will help us."

It becomes a very comforting thing for me, to remember that, again and again, when I think of all the failures that we're bound to have as a people....when I think of all the weaknesses that go with a government as wonderful as a democracy....it's an exceedingly helpful thing to remember that, again and again, in any great moment of our people, God has always been a definite reality.

I have hesitated in the preparation of this sermon, in deciding whether or not I should include what I am now about to tell you...I don't ever want to be misunderstood and I never want to be a party to anything that claims that America has a favorite spot in the eye of God...but it means a great deal to me today, to know that on the other part of the 'great divide' between the nations of the world, there is a people--there is a government--that is anti-god....that when they draw up the instruments of their government, they never so much as breathe the name of God; in fact, they take a measure of pride in classifying themselves as a "God-less society."

When I read American history--when I think of the framers of the Constitution and those who formulated the Declaration of Independence--my heart leaps high, when I remember that God did loom upon the horizon of their thoughts....that even so much as on the coin of the land, there should be these words--"In God We Trust"--that here and there, even in this day, there is some token, if only a token, of respect for the Almighty....that even so recently as the last World War, when out there in the Atlantic, certain representatives of the Free World said..."and what is it for which we fight?"....they could not help but say..."We fight for the freedoms of the world and for all people"....and one of those freedoms was the right of a man to worship God and to worship as he, himself, sees fit. It's a measure of comfort to me to realize that--that our land still pays reverence and respect to the Almighty--that it has not ruled God out of the Union--and that no matter what we may plan or purpose in the spirit of the founding fathers, we say, in spirit, if not at least verbally...."with firm reliance upon the protection of Divine Providence."

However, I am fully aware of the fact that, in comparatively recent times, there has been a new dependence upon God here in the United States, --not publicly proclaimed--but evidence of it here and evidence of it there--you know how it has happened....suddenly, some of us have been made aware that maybe we aren't first with some things....some of us have been forced to admit that those who occupy the other side of the 'great divide' do have a superiority--a greater stock-pile of this, or a greater stock-pile of that....and there has spread across the face of the United States--from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico--from the Atlantic to the Pacific....an uneasiness.

Could it be that no longer we are what we were taught in the days of our public school training?....that, in some areas and in some things, we no longer have the finest, the best and the most?....and, forced by that uneasiness, we've been tremendously concerned with the future, be-

cause of the need of the present hour....and there have been those who have been turning anew to God--and asking God to help them--and asking God to bless them. Man has a way of looking up, when he is forced to his knees.

Now, against that, and against this, which is also part of the background, I must say, that if someone were to ask me to catalog in my own humble way what I think is the most astounding thing that has happened in the last fifty years, I would have to say, "It's the expansion of the Soviet sphere." Our generation has never seen anything like it. Whatever else you may say about them, despite the fact that you may call them anti-god, they are a people with a plan....they are a people with a purpose....they are a people with a program. You may not care for their principles, but they do outline the future--they know exactly where they want to go and they know exactly how they are going to get there--and, much to your discomfort and mine, they may even know <u>when</u> they are going to get there.

Now, against all of that, we say..."God, be merciful to us...God, bless us....God, help us....after all, God, we do take your name and they don't....God, you can't afford to let us down"....and there are some people who think like that --there are some people who reason that way.

But this I say to you this morning, on this day so near the day that marks the independence of our country--suppose they don't take God's name, but suppose that in their planning and their programming they outwit us? Now, suppose we take God's name--we want God to help us....I must raise the question....why will you ask God to help us?....why should we ask God to bless America?....why should we ask God to make us strong?...this is the important question.

Centuries before Jesus Christ, there was somebody else who was interested in having God bless his native land--he knew that his people could not prosper--he knew that his people could not have their place in

the sun without firm reliance upon Divine Providence. So, in the classic words of Psalm 67, he says, "God be merciful unto us and bless us; and cause your face to shine upon us--give us credit, God--we're looking in your direction and we're asking a blessing."

But suppose he had stopped at that point? Suppose we would stop at that point? Suppose we say, "God bless us--God make us strong"---do we really have an advantage then, morally and spiritually, over people who prosper and do not take God's name in praise and reverence? What right do I have to criticize them if they prosper without God and I say my land will prosper only with God, if, when I take God's name, I want Him to bless me for my sake and my sake alone....if I say, "God bless America because America should be kept strong and free..."...period. So what credit is that?

The second verse of the Psalm 67...."God be merciful unto us, that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations"---this is the ground for the goodness that I want God to give me--this is the basis for the beneficence that I ask--"God, you be good to me, that through me, other people will benefit....God make me strong, that America may help the weak." This is what we must remind ourselves on this day so near the day that marks the independence of our country---- "God bless us and God make us strong....and God we'll never allow the day to come when we think we can get along without you....but help us to recognize the fact that your blessings may come to us only that they may be passed on to other people."

That leads me to ask you today....in your reading, required reading for every citizen of this land, have you come upon any statement--any account--of all the impoverished areas of the world--the countries so much in need, while we have so much? Do you know, as a citizen of the United States of America, just where and how we've extended a helping hand? Do you know anything at all about the Point Four Program?.....

and how certain people have been able to stand up and call us blessed, because, out of beneficence, we have done something to help them? Do you know where the goodness of America has gone?....and what is more--do you know where the goodness of America should go? Do you ever raise the question as to whether or not we are the "Big brother" to the other people of the world, just because we want to have ourselves gain some advantage by it? If this should ever be the basis for our beneficence, may God have mercy upon us!

On this day, so near the day that marks the independence of our country, does it weigh heavily upon your mind, my friend, that there are certain other peoples on the face of the earth who have just as great a desire for independence as we had? The only thing is that we're a century and more ahead of them--and they still have to achieve and to accomplish what is latent in the heart of every man. We who have achieved our independence--does it mean anything to us that there are the downtrodden--the impoverished--on the face of the earth....who are clamoring to be made free? And now that we've received our independence, we've run our course with indifference and become impervious to them---"God be merciful to us--God make me free"---but to what end? The Psalmist said..."that the whole world should benefit from it."

I like to think, in somber moments, that God has smiled upon America....broadly and favorably. I like to think for my part--how it may be with you, I do not know--that there is no place on the face of the whole earth quite as wonderful as this, our fair land. But the recipient of so great a blessing must keep his eyes open to the exercise of a great obligation. God has made us free....God enables us to be free....that, as long as we are free, we should have a burning heart for the enslaved, wherever they may be....in any corner of the earth.

SERMON, based on Luke 18:14 August 9, 1959

The sermon is based upon the Gospel lesson for the day. The text is the 14th verse of the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

> "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

For the thinking man in that congregation, when our Blessed Lord spoke these words, there must have been a decided shock in his system, for, to say the least, this is a startling thing for Jesus Christ to have said. You know that He is referring to a man that went to church and, when he was having his devotions and making his prayer, he could not name before God one single good thing to his credit, and he called himself a sinner and let the matter rest at that point.

While on the other hand, in the same church at the same time, there was a man, who, when he came to church, was able to parade before God as he had paraded before his fellow-men what seemed like an endless number of good things. He had kept the law. If the church said "Tithe this," he said, "All right--I will give ten percent of this and I will give ten percent of that as well." His record before men was a good one--decent and honorable.

These two men went to church. Both of these men prayed. Jesus Christ gives us an insight into the prayers of both of these men and then He says, "This man goes down to his house being made right in the sight of God," and the man to whom He makes reference is the publican--the man who couldn't name one good thing to his credit.

Now, the thinking man of that congregation might have said to himself, "You've misspoken, Preacher...You've lost your train of

thought, maybe.... In the excitement of what you wanted to say to us, you've become confused and you've brought your sermon to a close.... ..Surely, Preacher, you don't mean that this man, the man who can't name one good thing to his credit, is the man for whom God is reaching for a halo!...You're mistaken, Preacher!"

Now, the thinking man in the congregation might have looked at it that way, and well might you and I look at it right now in the very same spirit. For I say to you quite candidly, we in Saint Luke Church would be happy for a hundred men like the Pharisee, as far as being faithful to the church is concerned. The Pharisee was there every time the church bell rang--and the Pharisee was the kind of man who, whenever a program by his church was being offered, subscribed to it and said, "I want to do my part." The Pharisee was the kind of man who, if the church said, "Give ten percent of this," he said, "I'll also give ten percent of that."

Quite frankly now, almost any one of us would be very happy indeed if we had any number of people like the Pharisee, for taking the standards of men--looking at men horizontally--the Pharisee had much to be said in his behalf. I'm quite sure that he could get almost any office that he would have chosen to run for in any community---he was that kind of citizen--that kind of a patriot--and that kind of a person.

I'm reasonably certain that if the local Rotary Club had been looking around for a president--the local Kiwanis Club--the local Lions Club...they would have considered themselves having reached a stroke of good fortune if he would have been pleased to accept this preferment, this position of prestige--that's the kind of man that he was.

Now, am I to stand here this morning to tell you that the Phari-

see was not a good man? That I can not say--for a good man, by the standards of men, he was. And I cannot stand here at this sacred desk and tell you that the publican, even though he received the praise of God, was a good man.

You know what a publican was, don't you? He was an unusual creature. He was the type of person who, when the occupying authorities took control of his native land, he would go to them and he would say, "I know that you need money from these people....Now no one can collect it nearly as well as one of their own kind....If you give me the position, I'll see that your tax coffers are filled, and I only ask for one thing--that you give me a free hand, that I may be able to take whatever the traffic will offer, and what is more, whatever the traffic can stand." Now that's the kind of a person was a publican. And if any Jew was to be despised by another Jew, well certainly it's the Jew who would take advantage of his own people.

Now, this is the publican....and he went to church. I cannot stand here this morning and tell you that I would give him a halo. I cannot stand here this morning and tell you quite honestly that if I were to choose for the moment between the Pharisee and the publican, as far as having a record of good deeds is concerned, I wouldn't trade places with the publican. As far as the eye of men, I'd much rather have been in the role of the Pharisee--always on the side of good.

When men come to search the record, I would be pleased indeed if, when they went over the books, they might be able to name my name as they were able to name his name--a doer of good works--and a sharer in the things of the church.

Well, now, if this is the situation--if you cannot say that the Pharisee was evil--if you cannot say that the publican was good--what can one say? One must remember that there are two standards of judg-

ment. There is a standard of judgment that we exercise when we as men judge other men, and we are better because we are better than someone else...."this man has done this thing--I have not done it----therefore, I am better."...Now, that's the kind of judgment that men make.

But there's another kind of judgment--and this is the judgment that God makes--and God does not judge men, one by the other. The standard that God takes is the standard of Heaven itself, and men are judged by their relationship to God as well as their relationship to their fellow-men or vice versa.

Now, because this is true, Jesus, sharing this word deliberately, intends to shock the minds of his hearers, because He wants them to understand that, by His standards, the Pharisee is not good and, by His standard, the publican is not necessarily evil. But why?....This is the answer....The Pharisee was good, but he was proud of his goodness. The Pharisee was so good that he saw no need of becoming better. The Pharisee was so good that when he came to church he could profitably occupy his time by reciting his record of good deeds. Goodness that smacks of pride is not acceptable in the sight of God.

On the other hand, here is the publican--who couldn't name one good thing to his credit--and all that he could say...."I'm a sinner." And while the Pharisee looked out only upon men, the publican had only one direction in which to look, and that was up.

Now because this is the situation, Jesus Christ said, "This is the man who is more acceptable in the sight of God, because this man, in his weakness, senses his need for God." The Pharisee, with all the good that he has done, gives no evidence, whatsoever, of his need for God.

After it's all said and done, you can divide all people into two classes--those who think themselves good and have no need to improve--and those who think themselves wicked and have no desire except a thirst for God's salvation.

May I say this to you....that when we come to church this morning, if we are perfectly honest with ourselves, we could have a job keeping the Pharisee down within our breast....we could permit ourselves a fair measure of pride...."God, I can think of any number of things that I could have done last week, but I didn't do them...and, God, come to think about it, I'm right pleased with some of the things I did last week and, if you permit me, I think I can detect a fair smile of favor upon your face right now"...."and God, you know as I know, that of all the places to which I could have gone right now, I'm here, and I can think of any number of people who aren't....they live on my street--they work where I work"...(and some of you might be able to add)..."some of them live in the same house where I live!"

Now that's the way some of us might feel right now..."Open the book, God....get out the pencil....mark these things up to my credit...I'm naming them for you."

But did it ever occur to you that it's no mere accident whatsoever that in the ordered dignity of the worship in the Lutheran Church, the first ten minutes that we spend together, we spend talking about what?....our sins, and our need for forgiveness....and then we ascribe praise to God because of His cleansing grace. This is the thing acceptable in the sight of God--that when we should come, ours should be the prayer of the publican...."have mercy upon me, for I am a sinner."

Do not misunderstand--there is nothing to be said to the discredit of the doers of good. God needs to have done the kind of goodness the Pharisees did.....but it shouldn't be done the way they do it....and for the searcher of hearts and the trier of men's minds, this is

the acid test.

Whenever I have gone to London, I have always wanted to stand in the shadow of that magnificent church known as Saint Martin In The Field in Trafalgar Square. It's a church that's had an interesting bit of history. They had, after the first World War, a most unusual padre there--G. Studdard Kennedy--a man who loved people and knew how to talk with them and how to live with them and how to walk with them.

He used to tell how one of the men in his church came to him and laid bare his soul and told of his great problem--drink. He made one resolution after another....break it....try again....break it....try again. But for six months he was on the wagon, and then of all things, on Good Friday night, he went off on a binge.

When he was fairly sobered up on Saturday, the day before Easter, he came with great remorse to the padre. He fairly begged him for the opportunity to make a confession and to receive the assurance of God's forgiving grace....and with the plea that comes from the depth of an earnest soul, he said, "Please don't deny me the privilege of taking Communion on Easter morning"....the next day. The padre said, "If you are in earnest--if, in the face of your great sin, you do now desire to come, let me tell you this....as Jesus Christ was waiting for Peter after his experience of denial, so, I tell you, God will be waiting to see you on Easter Sunday in the morning!"

I wish I could end that story at that point, but human nature being what it is will not allow me to end it there, for there is another chapter that must be added. Having come and received Communion, much later on Easter Day, one of the pillars of the church came to Studdart Kennedy and took him to task...."What do you mean!....Everyone knows what kind of man he is....Everyone knows, in this church, what happened to him on Good Friday night--and then, the hypocrite, he comes on Easter Sunday in the morning and he asks for Communion!"

Who now, in the sight of God, my friend, do you think is the greater sinner? It could be, in the sight of God, that many a man, stained and soiled by sin, could be nearer to the Gate of Heaven, once he becomes penitent, than many another soul who, in the eyes of men, is good and goes around forever flapping his wings.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other--justified--that's the key word--that does not necessarily mean a better man--that does not necessarily mean a more exemplary character....but it does mean that this man went down to his house....made right with his relationship with God....than the other.

The thing that matters most is our relationship with God. "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Sunday, August 9, 1959 Pastor Shaheen

The sermon is based on the Gospel lesson for the day. The text is the 14th verse of the 18th Chapter of the Gospel according to Luke: I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone that exalted himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

For the thinking man in that congregation, these words of our Lord must have come somewhat as a startling thing. He might have reacted in this way: Preacher, you didn't with your subject, or you have lost your train of thought for the moment. You have become confused. Surely, you don't mean what you just said. "This man" -- and now you are referring to the Publican. You must have mis-spoken yourself.

Now the thinking man might have reacted in that way, and well for themment shall you react that way. For whatever else you may say about this parable, this is a parable with a surprise ending. Jesus was talking about two men who went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a Publican. Jesus allows us to hear their prayers, and as we listen to what they pray, we get some insight as to their character, and on the basis of that, Jesus makes an evaluation, which is a judgment, and the evaluation which he makes is quite contrary to the standard of measurement that you and I ordinarily exercise when thinking of people.

Now, this was the situation. Of the two men, one man when he went to pray was able to bring before God nothing except a record of good behavior. He could talk to God about any number of good things he had done. He was a Pharisee and that meant everytime the church bell rang, he was there. Everytime the Church sponsored a program inviting the people to participate in the things of the Kingdom in that day, you may rest assured the Pharisee was there, willing to produce and to participate. If the Church said, Give 10% of this, the Pharisee said, Not only 10% of that. I will also give 10% of this as well. By the measuring rod of man, , this man met all the standards of decent, honorable and respectable behavior. In fact, his record was so good that he could never forget it. And even when he went to pray, he occupied his time by telling God about his good record, (and with a very fair, impish (?) look, had I been standing nearby).

Yes, his record is so good that even while he prays, he thinks he can detect upon the face of God a very special favor for him.

Now, on the other hand, you have this other fellow who went to pray, and believe it or not, he could not think of a single good thing that he could name to his credit. All he could say was, God, Be merciful to me, a sinner.

Now, get this straight -- Jesus now says that this man who could not name a single good thing to his credit is the man who deserves commendation. The halo will go to this one, while, on the other hand, the man whose record was so good, decent, honorable and respectable, this man receives a measure of condemnation. Surely the thinking man of the congregation must have said, You are mistaken, Jesus; you have misspoken; you don't mean what you have said. And, whether you like it or not, Jesus was not given to the habit of misspeaking. He meant exactly what he said, and he preached the way he did because he wanted to prick the conscience of some men and wanted them to understand that the important thing in life is not how men measure one another. The important thing is how God measures men.

Now if you want to use the measuring rod of men, this Pharisee stands head and shoulders above most of us. In fact, he was so good the members of Saint Luke Church would be happy indeed if we had a hundred of his kind -- come to Church each time there is a service; participate in every worthwhile program in Saint Luke Church; give ten percent and more than that; to make the Church the center of his life. Aye, what we couldn't do, what the Kingdom of God couldn't do with people -- many, many people -- of that kind. The Pharisee was the kind of person that if he were a member of the Association, The Lions Club, the Rotary Club, and you had to select a President, you would consider yourself fortunate indeed if that man would accept the honor. That is the kind of a man the Pharisee was.

On the other hand, this was a publican. Historically, the publican was a different type of person, who when the Romans, the occupying authorities, came into Judea, he was clever enough to know that he could feather his own nest by going

to them and saying, These people you will want to tax, naturally. And maybe you will need one of their own kind to get the tax. I offer you my services. And then the Roman government would say, This is what we expect. This is the tax schedule. And that was about the way this as far as Rome was concerned, but it left the door wide open for the publican to take whatever the tariff would bear, and return to the Roman government only what they expected, but over and above that, as much as he could take, he could keep for himself. This was a kind of chap who went up into the temple to pray, despised by his fellowmen.

As Jesus brings his sermon to a close he reaches for a halo to put around this man's head. The thinking man of the congregation could have said -- as you could/say well -- Preacher, you are mistaken; you don't mean that. This is the way we measure it. And, I submit to you quite frankly, if I had to choose on the basis of ; on the basis of a good record, I would want to trade places with the publican. I would be delighted if I could be the chap with the record that the Pharisee had. Everytime the book was opened here was the Pharisee's name; everytime some good was done, you could always include the Pharisee's name; Pharisee; name the saints of the Church and always you could name the Pharisee. Yet, confronted by these words that Jesus Christ said, the good is to be said in behalf of the publican, the man who could not -- and I repeat it, -- who could not list to his credit one good thing that he had done.

Now why? For the simple reason that after it is all said and done, there are only two groups of people in this world: One group is a group of people so good that they have no desire to improve. They have arrived. One group so pleased with its behavior that they have no need of God's sustaining grace. You could divide all the people of the world into two groups. That is one group.

On the other hand, you will have another group. The people who know that they are absolutely nothing except as God smiles with favor upon them, and as God strengthens them and as God pleases (?) them.

Two groups: One group that has no need for God. Another group that needs God.

This is a story of the Pharisee and the publican. The Pharisee who was so good that he did not have to ask God for a single thing. The publican who was so bad the only thing he could ask was for God to forgive him and to bless him and to strengthen him.

You know, of course, if any preacher is worth his salt, he will try this sermon on himself for size before he goes to the altar. I say to you quite unashamedly that there is always the in the hearts of some of us to keep the Pharisee within our breast when we come to Church. The Pharisee raises his ugly head upon our shoulders every time you and I think like this: Here I am, fellow. I am in Church this morning. I can think of any number of people I know who are not here or in any Church; people who live on my street; people I will meet at the office tomorrow morning. And some might be able to say, Even people who live where I do; who sleep under the same roof where I sleep; who eat at the same table where I eat. Then we stick our thumbs within our breasts, project our chests and have a measure of satisfaction. I am here, God, and I can't think now for the moment of anything that I did last week that I would be ashamed for other people to know. Dear God, it is a wonderful feeling and I want you to know it. and I want you to know it, God, and if I had my way, I would want everybody else to know it, too.

Now this is when so-called good becomes evil. When a man becomes so good that there is no need for improvement, and there is virtue in the simple soul so stained with sin that the only thing he needs to ask for God -- the only thing he can ask from God -- forgiveness.

I am not to sure -- I must tell you this quite frankly -- I am not here saying this morning that the Pharisee was not a good man, and I am not here to say this morning that the publican, receiving the praise of Christ, was a saint. The Pharisee was a good man and the publican was wicked, having done evil. But I am aware of the fact that Christ sings the praise of a sinner who knew he was a sinner, and has no good word to say for the saint who knew that he was a saint.

This is rather true for the purpose. for the thing that

means most eventually is not our relationship with other men, but primarily our relationship with God, and once my relationship with God is made right, then I alter my ~~relationship~~ life accordingly with other men.

The Pharisee was a so-called good man, and the publican was a so-called bad man, but Jesus Christ ~~sings~~ sang the praise of the bad man who wanted to become good, and says nothing in favor of the good man who did not want to become better.

Whenever I have gone to London I have myself quite fortunate if I could get anywhere near Saint Martin's Cathedral, that historic church in Trafalgar Square. There are a number of good things one can say about any great church. A good many of them cluster around the personality of one man -- and who carried over into a parish ministry that wonderful insight that some men possess in understanding ; who never succumb to the temptation of a parish priest in and sitting in judgment on people, but who always try to look at them with the compassionate heart of Jesus Christ. The story is told that one day in his parish there was a man who came to him in great remorse. He was a man who fund one constant struggle after another in an endeavor to remain Christian, and his most besetting sin was always the matter of drink. He would become to inebriated that his whole life became disjointed and he lost his true identity, but again and again he would endeavor to get on the wagon. For a number of weeks he ~~succeeded~~ succumbed and then, on -- of all nights! -- Good Friday, he succumbed. When he was sufficiently sobered up on Saturday, he went immediately to Saint Martin's and the priest and asked to confess his sin. And in his confessional he said, Please, Padre, don't keep me away from the communion table on Easter Day morning. know men through the heart of God, discovered this tremendous well-spring of remorse and answered him in this way: As JesusChrist waited to greet Peter after his denial, so I tell you that God will be waiting to receive you at his table on Easter Day morning. I could end that story at that point, but I can't. Human nature is as human nature is, and there is another chapter that belongs to that story.

Later on, on Easter Day, one of the "pillars" of the church came to the Pastor and offered him a very unpleasant, ugly tirade against this man: Padre, everybody knows what he did on Good Friday night. Ask any number of the people who came to that same Communion Table, and they will tell you what kind of a chap he was:

kneeling before the altar on Easter Day in the morning. Padre, How could you ever give him the sacrament?

Which now of these two men is the greater sinner in the sight of God? I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than -----

The key word is "justified". Justified does not necessarily mean -- now this is terribly important -- justified does not necessiarly mean a better man; it does not necessarily mean a more exemplary man; it does not mean a man whose record is spotless. Justified means that this man went down made right in his relationship to God, for he asked forgiveness and the other man did not.

It is no accident that in this beautiful order of the worship services in the Lutheran Church that we spend a greater part of our coming together, at least the first ten minutes, in talking about our sins and asking God to forgive us. This is the essential thing. Soon the service will be over. We have come as a congregation. It could be that each of us falls in the category of one of two types.

Two men went up to the temple to pray -- the Pharisee and the publican. The parting word of Jesus Christ: This man went down to his house justified -- the sinner.

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August 16, 1959

WHEN LIFE TURNS ROBBER

The sermon is entitled, "When Life Turns Robber," and the text is from the 18th chapter of the Book of Judges. It is the 24th verse:

"Ye have taken away my silver and my god;
what do I have left?"

As interesting a passage as you will find anywhere in the Old Testament is this rather surprising story about a man named Micah. A son of his mother, he had observed how she received the family inheritance. A rather sizable sum of money, she treasured it greatly. She thought that she was able to hide it, but a wicked impulse had laid hold upon her son and he kept watching her as she put it in one place after another, as safe as any place that she might find.

But, unfortunately, this son Micah, unscrupulous character that he was, stole the family inheritance. He might have taken it out of greed--he might have taken it because of impatience--perhaps both--for could he have not reasoned to himself, "Well, some day it will come to me...why should I wait so long to enjoy it?...If I take it now, I can begin to spend it...and, after all, I know she'll pass it on to me."

He stole the family funds. He went his way quite undisturbed until he discovered that once his mother found the great loss, in good Near-Eastern fashion, she begged the gods in heaven above to pour down wrath upon the culprit. In a manner that only a Near-Eastern infuriated woman could give, she begged and begged the gods in the heaven above to deal treacherously with the thief.

Now this troubled her son greatly. What if the gods in heaven above should hear her prayer? What if he would have to pay so great a price for this, his misbehavior? Troubled in soul and mind and in

spirit, he comes to his mother and returns the money and makes confession. Delighted to have the money back, and pleased undoubtedly because of the confession that her son had made, she said, "This is what we will do...so that this no longer remains a great temptation for you or anybody else, we will take these pieces of silver and we will cast them into a god." A rather clever thing, don't you think--to have your silver and your god at the same time?

And then they went on and they got someone to come as a kind of priest--to be their own chaplain--to take care of the worship in their home and to see that this god received his due respect day by day. An interesting story, isn't it? But hold on, if you will----there's more to follow, and the last chapter is more interesting than the first.

Things went along fairly well for a while...The mother reconciled to her son and both of them doing worship before the god which they themselves had cast in their own home, with their own private priest. But, as fate would have it, one day there came a band of six hundred robbers--oh, you can read it for yourself--they were from the tribe of Dan, a landless and a lawless kind of people; and when they came near the home of Micah, they were very much impressed by his estate and also were somewhat pleased that here was a lad who had his own private chaplain.

Their curiosity was so great that one of their number went and parted the tent where the god was kept, and his eyes fairly popped---a silver god!---and he did the only thing that a wicked robber would do....he laid his hands upon it, and as though he would have his deed white-washed, he said to the chaplain..."and you'd better come along, too...if you can take care of this silver god here, you might just as well come along and be our private chaplain too."....and that's exactly what happened.

Micah came home and now Micah discovers the great loss. It was one thing when he stole the family funds, but now it's something else when somebody else comes along and steals the family silver and the family god. Greatly distraught, he gathers together a few friends and they go in hot pursuit--just a handful of folk going after six hundred thieves and robbers.

The thieves and robbers turn upon him and he cries out against them and they laugh and they laugh--laugh at a man whose only lament is this...."You have taken my silver and my god! What do I have left?" He cannot retrieve what has been taken. And now he turns around and goes back home. and I tell you there is no more desolate cry heard among those hills than this, as again and again a man, almost made mad, cries and mournfully declares, "You have taken away my silver--you have taken away my god. What do I have left?"

Life had turned robber. What did he have left? Ah, my friend, you catch on quickly, don't you? You begin at once to apply the truth to your soul. Suppose this should happen to me? For life has its peculiar twists and life has its peculiar turns and life, no matter what else you may say about it, has a way of turning robber. Life itself can be the great thief; and life can come upon us as the sons of Dan came upon the home of Micah; and life can take away from us, sometimes, the things that we value most.

If that should ever happen to you and you in desolation should cry out, "Life has taken away from me my silver and my god--what do I have left?"---what would you have left? Well, it all depends upon what you prize....it all depends upon what is your silver....it all depends upon what is your god....it all depends upon what it is that life could take away from you.

Shall we have a public exercise on the matter? Shall I endeavor to think in your behalf and to name some of the things that we value and treasure?...that, of all things, life could take away from us?

Some of us value health. We've lived long enough now to see some people who are denied health, and we see them amid their pain and their affliction and their frustration. We discover the things that they are denied because of their incapacitation. We cry out and say, "Oh, God, of all the things that could be taken away from me, please do not take away my health!"

Some of us say that one of the most valuable things that we possess is a good name. And there are some folk who will take their children aside and they will bring out all that is good within the family closet, and they'll talk about this character and about that character and say, "and you carry the same name and their blood goes coursing through your veins....Whatever you do in life, do not sell them short....You have a good name--live up to it!"

There are some people who have discovered the great value of a good name. Made penniless over-night, they have been able to begin all over again because, whatever else life might have taken away, their good name remained.

In my first parish, I listened to a man one time who told me about the great crash. He was made a pauper over-night....he went to sleep one night worth perhaps a half-million dollars....he got awake the next morning to discover the word had come that all that he held in stocks and bonds, and all of his investments, were taken away--so great had the crash affected him. The man redeemed the situation---and on what basis?---because of a name that he had treasured--his greatest stock-in-trade--his good name. Some of us say to ourselves,

"If everything else should be taken away, let me keep my good name!"

Some of us take pride in our possessions. We will tell people of how much land we own. There was once a man honest enough to tell me, when he took me over his estate, acre after acre, he said, "I can't help it but I must tell you, there's a terrific sense, I call it unashamedly--a pride--in possession....this belongs to me!" There are some people who take great joy in the things that belong to them.

But, if life should turn robber and these should be taken away, what would a man have left? Micah, in great desolation, lays bare the agony of his soul, "You have taken away my silver---you have taken away my god. What do I have left?"

Oddly enough for Micah, his religion was tied up with his silver god. That's the way they worshiped in those days....in early Israelitish history, nothing unusual about that--a man took something and made an image and this was his god! His religious experience was tied up with whatever happened before that image. Now, unfortunately for Micah, his religion was gone when they took away his silver god.

You and I have an advantage. We begin even beyond the point where Micah ended. Our religion is not tied up with something that we can feel and touch and see, as far as material substance of this world is concerned. Our religious experience is linked with an experience in Jesus Christ....a confrontation with the Person of God... and I must pause long enough to ask you---could it be, however, that yours could be a kind of religious experience that---it could be taken away from you?

Let me put it for you in this form....suppose, by some strange fate, this place called Saint Luke Church--this edifice--should be destroyed, and no brick--no mortar--no stained-glass windows--no altar

to which you could come as you come now....would your god have been taken away?

Suppose something should happen to you that you should never again mark the place where an altar was raised? Suppose something should happen to you that never again would you be able to share a corporate worship experience--never again would you hold in your hand this magnificent liturgy of the church?....would your god be taken away?

As long as God gives me memory, I shall always want to recall my friend Alexander Kulilenko, who went out the back door as the Communists came in the front, over in Estonia. Reared in Russia as a child, he had served as an altar boy in his beloved church. He goes out the back door as they come in the front....the only thing he takes with him is what he has in here. And again and again I knew great joy in my heart when, even though he could not confess as some of them did to the teachings of the Lutheran Church as such, he would come again and again to receive the Holy Communion; and no matter what others did, as he waited to receive it--always the sign of the cross. And whenever he came, he sat down with the profoundest regard for the altar. And I said to myself, "Life has taken away from him so much----but the most precious thing remains--his belief in God."

To be numbered with his kind, Ionas Edwardus Diederas Simaitis, a lad still in his teens when he came to live with us...his father a distinguished school teacher in Lithuania, for political reasons had rotted away in a concentration camp. Under the guidance of the church, Simm, as we called him affectionately, came to live with us, and it was my responsibility as the parish pastor to explain to him our order for Worship, and so I endeavored to teach him in English the Liturgy of the church and the Apostles' Creed; but when I came to the

Lord's Prayer, he shook his head and he said, "No, Pastor--if you please--no! It means so much to me if, even in this strange land, I can continue to pray the Prayer of our Lord in the language that my father taught me." This was not the refusal of one man to be Anglicized....this was a triumphant declaration of a man who, no matter how greatly fortune might have bereft, he had not lost his personal faith in God, even as given to him by a saintly father.

"You have taken away my silver...you have taken away my god.... what do I have left?"....If this should ever happen to you, what should you have left? It becomes good dicipline for each one of us, sometime, to sit down and discover how much of our time and energy is actually spent on things that could be taken away; and, sometimes, how little of our concern is given to the things that, when all else is taken away, this would remain.

One time. a handful of men sat by a seaside shore and, with the moon reflecting upon the water, they gave themselves to thinking seriously, and one of the number said, "Why don't we exercise this great freedom among ourselves--to name the thing that we consider our greatest loss in life."

One man talked about the fortune that he had amassed that was taken away; and one man talked about the woman that he loved and courted and lost; and another man talked about the sons that he had adored--fairly idolized--who turned out to be reprobate; and each man thought his loss the greatest.

And then one man spoke up and said, "But I have lost my faith in God....I no longer believe that God is good." And almost to a man, they chimed in as with one voice, "Ah, sad loss as we have met, but

yours is saddest yet; for the believing heart has gone from you!"

"You've taken away my silver and you've taken away my god---- what do I have left?"....Beloved, how long would your list be? That isn't the important question. The important question is--what would be on your list? What could you name as the thing that remained--- as a garment for your soul---as the inner lining for the fabric of your heart?

August 23, 1959

EYES THAT SEE

The sermon is entitled, "Eyes That See." It is based upon the Gospel for the day and the text is the 23rd verse of the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

> "And he turned him unto his disciples and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see"

What a pity that He should be the one who should speak these words. Wouldn't it have been far more wonderful if one of the disciple band would have turned to Jesus and said, "We consider ourselves most fortunate, Christ. We are select number of people..... We've been traveling with you for some time now...We've heard you preach....we've seen you work miracles....we've had confidential conversations taking place ever so often with you....we've been able to see things that other people have not been able to see!"

And they would have spoken the truth, of course. For any man who looked into the fact of Jesus Christ sees what prophets and priests and good and wise men in one generation after another had prayed for---they had longed for the fact that the day should come in their day when God would visit earth, and Love would be incarnate, and men could walk in the very presence of Jesus Christ.

How wonderful it might have been if one of the disciples could have said, "Our eves are blessed indeed, because of what we see." What a pity that the words had to come from Jesus Himself. A pity, perhaps---yes---but a necessity; for only He who is truth is able to explain to other people what it is that they see, once they are exposed to truth itself. It's such a simple illustration that I share with you now: if you've ever had the good fortune to be in an artist's studio at the same time when the artist is there, you know

what happens--you go looking at one masterpiece following another, and as the artist and the painter himself comes to you, he is in a position to explain to you what he has done and then, through his eyes, you begin to see ever so much more than what you might have been able to see with your own eyes.

Jesus Christ, standing in their midst, was made aware of the fact that He was God of very God, begotten, not made. This is the dream of the ages--this is God in the flesh--and so Jesus the Master, says to the disciple band, "Look now and see what you ought to see because your eyes are blessed."

But one raises the question: Did they really see? Did they possess spiritual protection? Did they really have spiritual insight? One wonders if they really did see Jesus, even though they were, of all people, the most fortunate; because we dare not forget that this same disciple band---to whom Jesus had said, "You are blessed of people because you see what others do not see"---this same disciple band, mark you, had in its number a Peter....and what happened with Peter?....did he not deny his Lord?....if he actually saw Jesus Christ as God, could he have denied Him?

In that same disciple band to whom Jesus Christ said, "Your eyes are blessed because of all people you see certain things,"---there was a Judas....and what did Judas do?....Judas betrayed Jesus Christ....Could Judas have really betrayed Jesus Christ if he really had seen Him?

The question remains---even though they had eyes by which to see and could be of all people the most fortunate, did they really see? That entire disciple band--what was the story they wrote of Jesus and of His earthly pilgrimage--did they not forsake Him and run away? If they had really seen Him, could they have done that?

And how about the multitude? Were there not five thousand

of them who heard Him preach on one occasion?...and so enthralled were they by His preaching that they forgot the hour of the day. If they had really seen Him, why did they allow the crucifixion to take place? Five thousand people is a sizeable number of people; and five thousand people as of one mind, if they threw their weight in the right direction, could almost stop anything. If they saw Him, did they really see Him? The question remains---Jesus said, "you, of all people, are in a position to see Me,"--but did they really see Him?

The truth inherent in this text can be very kind (?) One applies it right now--to this congregation--to each of us who makes up this faithful band right now. We can be called the friends of Jesus... ..we can be called members of the disciple group....we've been told about Christ....we've been taught about Him in Sunday School....we've professed Him as Lord and Saviour....some of us come here every Sunday because we say we come here to see Jesus and we want to follow Him---but the question remains---have we really seen Him as He is?

Jesus said, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see,"---- --you can turn the words around--"Blessed are the eyes that are in a position to see what you should see." Why was it they did not see Him as He really was?---for the simple reason, my friend--they were looking at Him through their own eyes and they were limited by their own vision. For instance, when He stood up to preach--never did anyone preach the way He preached--but then they were enthralled by His words, and some of them could never get beyond the words of the Preacher to the truth that He was declaring because they were human--they were overwhelmed by a man who was a preacher, and Jesus Christ never came to this world just to be seen as a preacher.

Some of them saw Him perform miracles. They were overwhelmed by His power. They had never seen anything like it--why He even had

the magician's touch! But Jesus Christ did not come to this world just to be seen by men as a wonder-worker---He came that men should see through the performance of miracles the power of God at work---this was dramatized love in action! The miracles were performed for a purpose--and He had an end in mind--and Jesus never intended they should be lost by becoming too interested in the means toward the end.

Some of them, in that day, saw Him...yes...and they saw Him with His overwhelming popularity....and they wanted to make Him a king. But Jesus Christ never came into this world to be seen simply as a great leader. He came into this world to lead men that they should see the things to which He was leading them---the thing beyond the leader is the all-important thing. But for some people, that's all they saw when they saw Jesus Christ--a great preacher------a wonder-worker--and a great leader of men.

Preachers are always pleased to a degree when someone in the congregation says, "I enjoyed your sermon, Pastor," but any preacher worth his salt will think twice when he's given a compliment like that, for no preacher simply preaches that people might enjoy what he's saying. And even though Phillips Brooks has given that wonderful definition of preaching as "truth communicated through personality," the comment that means most to the preacher, once the sermon has been preached, is this--"I am in your debt, Preacher, for the picture that you gave me of God this morning, and for the truth of God that's come into my heart as you took me by the hand, figuratively speaking, and ushered me into the very presence of God."

Every time the preacher goes into the pulpit in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Atlanta, Georgia, his eyes are intended to fall upon a certain scriptural passage, carved into stone---"Sir, we would see Jesus." Jesus came into the world that

men would see Him as He actually is. He is God---and anyone who sees Him as less than that has faulty vision and has failed to spiritually perceive Jesus Christ.

I want to tell you something quite unashamedly this morning--it has occurred to me on occasion that sometimes, when some of us come to Saint Luke Church, we should fail to see what we ought to see. We may have eyes, but we do not spiritually perceive. Some of us, when we come to church, see the stained-glass windows, but we never get beyond the thing for which the stained-glass windows stand; some of us may come to Saint Luke Church and be impressed by the Cross upon the altar, but we may never get beyond the Cross to the thing for which it stands; some of us may come to Saint Luke Church on a Sunday morning and look around about and see one another, and we may never get beyond the thing that has brought us here. This is the risk that we run--lest even here in this place where we come to better see God, we might not truthfully perceive Him.

Several Sundays ago, a member of this parish was somewhat impressed with the dignity of the worship experience in Saint Luke Church. On a Monday morning, he called and he said, "It could be that, come mid-September, when Premier Khrushchev comes to the United States, that if, as good hosts, we want to give him a good picture of Americana and a complete picture of Americana, those who plan his itinerary would do well to include a visit to a worshiping Christian congregation on a Sunday morning." He also implied that maybe the Pastor of this church might extend an invitation to Premier Khrushchev, through the proper authorities; that Saint Luke Church should be that church that he might visit.

Suppose now--you know now that there's no liklihood whatsoever that that should happen--but suppose it did happen--and Premier

Khrushchev was in this congregation on a Sunday morning--this avowed non-believer....who does not need take the name of Christ....who, in his own heart, presumably detests the things for which the Christian Church stands....this avowed enemy of the Cross of Christ--suppose he would be here--and when the hour was over, could it be that a dent would have made on his soul?....that in all honesty and candor, he would have to admit, "While I was with those people in Saint Luke Church, I could not help but feel that they were sensing something--that they had spiritual perception--they were seeing something that was making a change in their lives."

Could that be typical of this congregation?...that when we come together and worship that people could say that we see something?---verily, the very face of God! I'm not worried that that should ever happen--that Khrushchev should come here--but this I would say: that almost any given Sunday, we run the glorious risk of having a non-believer come to this place--of having someone who has yet to profess faith in Jesus Christ cross this threshold ..... and could it be that, after an hour spent in this place, he should say to himself, "Those people have seen something and those people have perceived something that I must know for myself." Could that happen?

I do not know how it is with you, but as for myself, every now and then I make a prayer in the worship service that God would enable me to see the things that ought to be seen when we come together....that, for instance, when, during the singing of the hymn, I might scan the congregation and look upon you--that I might be able to see what other people do not see with the naked eye, and that you might see the same thing--the influences for good which have brought you to this very place....that I might be able to see behind some of you in this congregation right now....the prayers of a godly mother in North Carolina....that I might be able to see that

sainted father who in North Dakota, South Dakota or Iowa, brought you, with his devoted mate, to the font and had you named for Jesus Christ....that I ought to be able to ask God that right now I could see, with spiritual perception, that host in Heaven, a beloved member of your family, who from Heaven above takes great satisfaction in seeing that you are remaining faithful to your Christian obligation right now.

As the present Pastor of this church, I ask God again and again to give me a vision of a man I never met but who, as a pastor of this church, prayed and dreamed earnestly for the very construction of these walls--the beloved Dr. Raymond Sorrick--who, they tell me, even helped make suggestions for this rose window above the altar....a man who never walked this aisle. And I say to myself, "I would not be fair to the people of this church and I would not be fair with the yesterday of Saint Luke if, when we come together, I did not try to spiritually perceive these things.

We may have eyes but we may not see. Jesus said, "Blessed are the eyes that see the things that you could see." Maeterlinck tells about a man who went into a very lovely garden, and as he went into that garden he was accompanied by a guide--a very precious old lady--and as they went from one patch in the garden to another, she described for him, in exquisite fashion, the beauty that he would see....and he marveled at the way she was able to share the beauty of the garden. And he said to her, "How is it that you can do this?" She said, "I must tell you, sir....some ten or fifteen years ago, I was warned that some day I would go blind....From that day onward, I made up my mind that I would endeavor to see everything upon which my eye fell as clearly as I could....I made up my mind that I would use my eyes to see." And as she ended her sentence, she turned her face toward his and then he discovered that she was totally blind at

that moment. Blessed are the eyes that see.

My friend made a trip to Europe not so long ago. He knew full well that when he went to Europe he would see indescribable beauty in certain places. He also knew that he had certain friends that would never make the trip, so he wanted to share that beauty with them. He went to a photographer and got his advice for a camera--he thought he got the finest and the best that he could afford--and then he was quite extravagant in the purchase of film--- he wanted the best and as much as he could take....and then he went clicker-happy throughout Europe, clicking here and clicking there.. ....you can imagine his consternation when he returned, at journey's end, to discover that when the film came back from the processing laboratory, that there wasn't a single clear and perfect image in any one of the transparencies. Something had gone wrong with his camera--and this he discovered at journey's end.

This, my friend, could be the tragedy of life for some of us-- that when we should come to journey's end, and if the past should be revealed to us, we would have to be told that there were some people who failed to get a clear and perfect image of the face of Jesus Christ, because the thing that we shared with them was imperfect. It could be that there are some people who will never see Jesus Christ, except through your eyes. A noble prayer for any of us could be this: "Open my eyes that I may see."

"..... and she prayed - God help me, that I may not fail in this one task, which perhaps alone all others, is my reason for existence...."

Thoughts on the Sermon

August 30, 1959

--ON IMITATING CHRIST--

The sermon is based upon the Epistle lesson for the day and the text is the 22nd verse of the 5th chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians:

> "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance..."

That sounds like an excellent descriptive of the Christian life, doesn't it? Take any one of these nine virtues and you can get in front of you a perfectly clear and vivid image of Jesus Christ; for as you remember His life, you say to yourself, "This sounds like someone talking about Jesus Christ--a Man whose spirit was filled with love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, kindness, temperance, faithfulness--this is Jesus Christ!

Interestingly enough, the Apostle Paul had been writing to the church in Galatia, and he was quite concerned that they should get in front of them a very clear picture of what it means to be a Christian, and in this epistle lesson for the day he talks about two things--he gives them two sides of one picture--you can tell a Christian by what he will not do;....you can also tell a Christian by the spirit that characterizes his life.

That's why he goes on at length, this man Paul, in this epistle lesson for today, to name a lot of ugly sins. And after he has named all of these ugly things, he says anyone who does any one of these, or anyone who does them, cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. So the Christian, if you please, is one who is not a party to these ugly sins.

But, on the other hand, he turns the picture and he says, "This, too, is a Christian----a man who is characterized by this spirit...who, instead of these ugly things, who not doing these ugly things---you can pick him out because he's filled with the Spirit--the fruit of the Spir-

it--love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, gentleness, meekness, temperance....now this is what it is to be a Christian.

Stephen Neal, in his very valuable book entitled, "The Christian Character," begins his opening chapter with these words..."To be a Christian is to be like Jesus Christ." Now, immediately you and I ask the question..."But is this possible?....Can a man be like Jesus Christ?" We remember what He was like and we have to say that He was sinless. We review His life and we call Him the personification of perfection. Now is it within the realm of possibility that any one of us can become like Him....the sinless one....the perfect one? There's no use talking about this whole proposition of becoming like Jesus Christ if it's out of the realm of possibility. We might just as well spend our time talking about other things than to deal with the impossible.

Let's establish clearly in our minds that Jesus Christ was sinless---that He is the personification of perfection--and yet, almost every preacher that you've ever heard and every Sunday School teacher that you've ever known and any godly parent with whom you've had to do business----these have told us that we ought to become like Jesus Christ. Now....is this possible?

It seems that Jesus Christ thought it was possible. Very early in His ministry He set about to recruit certain people. He had a name for them--a name that remains unforgotten to this day--the name for them....disciple. Now a disciple is a learner and a person who learns by following....and a fervent dream in the mind of Jesus Christ was this---that some day, that is eventually, having followed Him as closely as He hoped that they would--that other people would find something of His spirit in and through them. Jesus Christ knew something of the economy of time and energy and surely He would not have wasted

His efforts if He did not believe that it was within the realm of possibility that men and women could become like Him.

All right, you and I are willing to acdept that--as a statement of fact--but then we draw back quickly and we say..."Granted, this is true and Jesus Christ called the disciples after Him that they might follow Him and become like Him....but they surely didn't stack up a very impressive record at the first." When you scan the pages of the Gospel record--Matthew, Mark, Luke and John--and you deal with the disciples as they followed Jesus Christ before His death, you and I shake our heads and we say...."Their record is no more impressionable than ours would have been."....Look how often He had to say to them..."Why, you don't have any faith!"....Look how often He had to take time to explain and explain and explain just what it was that He was driving at....how often He had to chide and to correct them. And isn't this the sad story of their record---- that before the crucifixion they betrayed--they deny--they forsake!

Come now, Jesus Christ....where is your optimism---men are capable of becoming like you?....And so we say to ourselves, "Well, if hand-picked men, chosen to follow Jesus Christ, cannot write any more impressionable record than that, what hope is there for you and for me? What word of encouragement can be given us?

There's something else to be said. The disciples wrote two records of discipleship. There is the record of their lives before the death of Jesus Christ; then there is the record of discipleship following the resurrection and the post-Pentecostal period----and this we dare not overlook.

Before the resurrection and before Pentecost they were weak, frail creatures, who did not prove very likely followers. But after the resurrection and after Pentecost they are recognized as men trans-

formed, They are recognized as men whose religion is so radiant that one day in a Syrian city there were some people who saw them and when they saw the way they lived, the way they talked, the way they conducted themselves in the market-place and in their own homes, they said...."There's only one word for these people--they act like Jesus Christ--they have His spirit"....and from that day onward the disciples were known by the name....Christian.

Ah, we must admit that when you look at the disciple record there is a difference--a difference like night from day--between what they were before Pentecost and what they were after Pentecost. Now take heart, my friend....Now let courage grip your soul. It is possible to become like Jesus Christ, for the Gospel record in the Acts of the Apostles proves it--it did happen--men who might have had a halo around their heads, but whose feet were still made of clay--were able to reveal the spirit of Jesus Christ....now how was it possible? How can a man become like Jesus Christ?

Well, I must tell you this....it does not become possible by simply trying to copy Jesus Christ. On a stand near my desk in my office here in this church is as valuable a devotional booklet, I suppose, as has ever been written--Thomas à Kempis'S, "The Imitation Of Christ." But one must be very careful when he uses that word 'imitation.' God never intended that you and I, any one of us, should become a copy of Jesus Christ outwardly. You cannot say..."I will try to discover how Jesus talked...how He ate...how He slept...how He drank...how He prayed--and then I will follow His physical characteristics as nearly as possible...and so I shall become a copy of Jesus Christ!

To the everlasting credit of the Gospel writers, you cannot find to your satisfaction exactly what Jesus Christ looked like.... you cannot find anywhere how He reached for the bread and how He ate..

...you cannot find anywhere the accent of His voice recorded---this is good!....because in the plan of God, no man should ever become a mere copy physically or outwardly of any other--because this is imitation in the most unsavory sense of the word.

When we were students on the 'Hill of the Prophets' at Gettysburg Seminary, we had a professor in Preaching who kept drumming into our ears----"When you develop your style for preaching, make sure it's your own style...Don't stand up in the pulpit and imitate the style of your teacher, your professor, your own pastor, your preacher back home, or any great preacher that you may have met---never let it be said that the way you gesture, they say...'Ah, yes, that's the gesture of So-and-So'...and the way you talk...'That's the way So-and-So talks'... ..When you stand up to preach, be yourself---possessed by the Spirit of God!"

And the greatest contribution perhaps that any one of us has to make to the Kingdom of God is the personality by which God has clothed him, and if this we deny, we keep from Him something very sacred. Ah, it must be remembered that the disciples did not become like Jesus Christ simply by trying to become an outward copy.

And on the other hand, they did not become like Jesus Christ because they followed set rules and regulations---they had no code book to which they turned and said..."Tomorrow morning at ten o'clock we must do this....tomorrow afternoon, when we are confronted by such-and-such a group of people, we must react to them in this way, because this is what the book says"....How, then, did they become like Jesus Christ? The answer is a very simple one and becomes the ground for your hope and for mine---they became like Jesus Christ because they were possessed by His Spirit---they were captured by all that He was!

And the Apostle Paul wants to spell this out very explicitly

for his hearers in Galatia and that's why he says "the fruit of the Spirit,"--and then he names these nine virtues that are typical of the Christian life...."here they are"....and they become the fruit of the Spirit. A Christian is one who is like Jesus Christ.

But we're not interested in the definition right now--we're interested in motivation....How does one become the kind of person who is like Jesus Christ? A person becomes the kind of person who is like Jesus Christ because he's been possessed by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. That's why in this Epistle for the Day---and it bears reading, my friend---Paul talks about being led in the Spirit...Paul talks about 'walking in the Spirit'....Paul talks about the 'fruit of the Spirit.'

Now there are two things that demand concern immediately in this text: the fruit of the Spirit--mark you, it is singular--do not make the mistake of reading it..."and the fruits of the Spirit are... love, joy, peace, longsuffering, etc."....it is singular--the fruit of the Spirit. Once a person is possessed by the Spirit of Christ, all these other virtues here named become typical of him.

Sometimes I read interesting books on "How To Do-It-Yourself In The Christian Life", you see.....well, this year I'll try not to become angry--I'll try that for three months--I'll guard myself--every time I become infuriated, I'll concentrate on that, and then, one day, I'll no longer become infuriated.....and then, once I have conquered anger, then I will conquer jealousy--and every time I find myself prone to become jealous, I will say to myself--"No, this is not typical of the Christian--I dare not become jealous"--and after three months, perhaps, I shall have conquered the sin of jealousy.....then I shall begin on another sin.....

No, my friend--one does not become a Christian like that. One becomes a Christian by asking for the Spirit of Christ; and once the

Spirit of Christ is laid hold upon a man, all of these other virtues fall into their rightful place.

A man cannot be a Christian and be loving and hating at the same time. A man cannot be a Christian and be loving and yet not gentle. A man cannot be a Christian and be loving and gentle and yet not patient. Possessed by the Spirit of Christ, all of these things eventually become typical. It is the fruit of the Spirit--this is the result--and all of these can happen.

Now the other thing that needs careful concern is the fact that the word 'fruit' is used. We are not talking about seeds. This is what happens once the Spirit possesses a man---this is the harvest of the soul---this is what happens after a person has been captivated by the Spirit of Christ....and there must always be the necessity of first being laid hold upon--a person does not become Christian overnight. It takes time to grow an oak tree---it takes time to grow the Christian grace.

I have a very interesting book that has this very significant paragraph on the fly-leaf....I cannot tell you who wrote it....but it's supposed to be the picture of serious-minded modern man after World War II who goes, in his dream, to a store, and to the angel behind the counter he says...."I am sick and tired of war--my soul hates all the ugly aspects of man's inhumanity to man--I have a hunger for the things of the spirit--Give me, I beg you, the fruits of the spirit--Give me, for my new world, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, patience, gentleness, kindness...."....And the angel behind the counter said..."I am sorry, sir....We do not deal in fruits....They cannot be sold....We deal only in seed."

This could be the tragedy for us....that in our day and in our age we eagerly want to pluck the fruits of the Christian life and forget that at some other time the seed had to be sown....and all the

nurturing and developing of the things of the spirit had to have their rightful hour.

I find it profitable reading sometimes to go back and check on some periodicals back in the middle forties--just before, now, the war was going to be over--and here were the dreams of men--what a new world they'd have and how different it would be.....and now, upon sober reflection, I say....It is one thing to dream nobly, but how foolish can a man become----to think that over-night he can get a harvest!

Somewhere, sometime, somehow--a person must first sow seed. While there is still time for you and me, my friend, why don't we pray more fervently for God to sow the seed of the Spirit in your life and in my life, so that some day when we want to develop fully the Christian life, the fruit will be natural---and it will be there.

Is it possible to be like Jesus Christ? It is! But you have to follow the pattern of the disciples---you must learn of Him and then take what He promises. To His disciples He said...."I will give you my Spirit"....and it wasn't until they were willing to ask for His Spirit and to receive it that they become worthy of the name Christ. I say to you as earnestly as I can....I don't care how many rules and regulations you keep in the Christian religion---you'll never be worthy of the name Christ until you are possessed and captivated by the Spirit of Christ.

..... "and you'd better go a little further, preacher ... the seed can't grow if the soil is choked with weeds ... the flesh with the affections and lusts, must be crucified .... "Thoughts on the Sermon"

We've had so much on our minds, O God, as we've come to this place. Some of us think very earnestly about those who, in another year, an earlier year, planned and prayed and purposed that this House of God should be erected...here. We thank Thee for their labors.

We thank Thee for their integrity and their devotion--and as they planned, they planned wisely and well.

There is so much upon our mind as we come here because we cannot help but think of those who, in earlier years, stood at this sacred desk and proclaimed Thy truth....how they fed the souls of a waiting people with the Word of Life.

We cannot help but think, of O God, of those who made certain promises before this altar and at the baptismal font... who, Sunday by Sunday remember how they promised to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.... how, before this altar, they promised to follow Him all the days of their lives. We think of them.

And as we come, we also think of all whom we love, separated from them as we may be, and whatever our heart's desire would be right now, we would not ask from Thee, except it be given them also.

We think of the sick, the lonely, the discouraged...those for whom we have affection, who think that they can walk without Thee....those who bring a burden to our hearts because of their indifference to Thy love.

And we thank Thee that when we come, that Thou dost ease the burden from our hearts and Thou dost say to us..."I know, ...I understand....and I will take away your sin and I will help you to carry the burden."

Heavenly Father, suit us therefore according to Thy purpose. Find us useful, grateful, and always faithful....and when our last hour may come, suffer none of us to fall from Thee.

MOUTHPIECE FOR THE LORD

Ordinarily anything that is new or strange carries with it some beneficial results. That is the experience that some of us find to be very true in the relationship of this church to the new Lutheran Service Book and Hymnal. It was about a year ago when it was first introduced to this parish. I do not know how it may be with you specifically but, as for me, I am willing to admit that one of the very fine things about the use of this new service book and hymnal is the introduction to each church service, as we observe it on a Sunday morning, of the reading of an extra lesson--- the introduction of the Old Testament lesson.

It has been established on more than one occasion and on good authority, too, that the only Bible reading that some people have is the kind of Bible reading that they share together on a Sunday morning as a part of the church service. As proof positive, how many Bible verses have you read during the past week? And if you have read a sizeable amount, did you by any chance happen to read the particular lessons ascribed for today?

Each Sunday now until next June, in all liklihood, the sermons being preached from this pulpit by this pastor will be based upon the Old Testament lesson for the day, as we turn back to these pages, centuries before the coming of Christ, that through the word revealed at that time, we might better appreciate Him who is the Living Word.

The sermon for this morning is entitled, "Mouthpiece For The Lord." It is based on the Old Testament lesson for today and the text is the 16th verse of the 17th chapter of the book of I Kings:

> "And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah."

The title for the sermon is obvious in the text. Here it is recorded that God had seen fit to speak to a human being. As we turn the pages of the Bible and read it chapter by chapter, we gain the impression that God, time and again, reaches for a human being when He wants to speak His voice and when He wants to declare His truth--He chooses human personality.

Ah, there are times when He will use the earthquake, the wind and the fire, but the preferred method of revelation seems to be person-to-person, or rather to one man through another man. If you want proof, what finer proof could you have than the Incarnation itself--when God saw fit to come to earth to give the greatest of all revelations, He chooses the son of a carpenter.

Now let's get back to the day's Old Testament lesson. It deals with a man, Elijah, who, according to God's plan, becomes God's agent and God's mouthpiece. As to the origin of Elijah, we are left very much in the dark. We only know that at a time when the kingdom was being ruled by a wicked man, Ahab by name, and whose wickedness seemed to be outdistanced by a sinister soul, Jezebel, his queen, there appears on the horizon this man of God. Elijah so speaks against the sins of Ahab that there is brought down upon him the wrath of Jezebel and he is forced to flee.

Do you remember the story from your Sunday School days?---how for months he found refuge in a cave--and then the word of the Lord comes to him that he must go to a Baal-worshiping city up near Tyre and Sidon, Zarephath by name. It could well be that Jezebel would never think to look for this man in the very citadel of Baal worship. So off he goes. And when he gets near the gates of the city, he sees a woman gathering sticks and he calls to her, "Would you mind bringing me something to drink?"....and then she complains

to him that, well, she will do it, but Elijah also says, bold as he is, "And while you're at it, would you mind bringing me something to eat?"....and the woman says, as she recognizes him as an Israelite and a worshiper of Jehovah, "I say to you, by your God, Jehovah, that I have nothing to set before you except--all that I have--a little bit of oil...a little bit of meal...and I am now gathering sticks to prepare my last meal that my son and I may lie down and die."

So great is her need--so extreme her want--that Elijah makes her a promise...."I'll tell you what," says he, "If you bring me something to eat--now first prepare the meal....get it ready...but before you eat, you give something to me to eat, and if you do it, I promise you that you will always have an ample supply of provisions until God sends rain upon the earth again."

Now the widow woman took this man at his word; and before she gave her son to eat and before she ate herself, mark you, of her last provisions, she first gave this stranger. The Scriptural comment is this, "And the barrel of meal did not waste and the cruse of oil did not fail, according to the word of the Lord which was spoken by Elijah."

This very wonderful story does not end on this point however. There's another exceedingly fine chapter. The widow woman's son becomes ill and is nigh unto death and Elijah comes and restores the child to life; and then she steps aside from the page of Scripture and Elijah moves on, but as he severs his relationship with this woman and this village in Zarephath, this woman is heard to exclaim, "Now I believe in the true Jehovah God and I believe that you are a man of God!"

I submit to you this morning that there is no experience quite as singular as coming into an abiding reality of God. And that's exactly what has happened to this woman. A stranger has come into her life, and when he departs from her village, all that she can say is, "I believe in God, and I believe in God because I have found Him through you." Elijah is the mouthpiece of God.

Now this is time for soul-searching. How many people could there be who are numbered in the great Book of Life because of you--because of me? How many souls are there who have come into an abiding reality of God because you and I have been that agent of God, serving as an instrument in His hand, by which His purposes had been made plain to them?

I would remind you of an opening paragraph in this sermon--that God's preferred method of communication--the method of revelation that He chooses most--the one in which He places greatest value--is person-to-person....man-to-man....soul-to-soul. How has God found us on that score? Could it be said of us as Stanley said of Livingstone....I have been told that Stanley was not the most salutary of characters--that there were people, I suppose, who wagged their heads when they heard that Stanley was going to go and look for Livingstone--and they might have said, facetiously, "Let's hope and pray that if he ever does find Livingstone, that something of Livingstone will rub off on Stanley!"

Well, something did...for Henry M. Stanley, writing on David Livingstone, says...."It was made very plain to me that this man was being sustained and influenced by the forces of heaven. This man has the Holy Spirit in him. You cannot be in his presence without sensing Jesus Christ. It must be a wonderful thing to be able to believe in Christ when you meet a disciple of His as fine as Livingstone."

God sees fit to communicate with man. This God of ours is a God who speaks and when He speaks, He usually speaks to a human being. How many have heard His voice because of us?

The most awesome tribute I ever heard given to a preacher was the tribute paid my predecessor in a former parish. He had been there for almost fifty years. He was a venerable patriarch--as kindly and warm-souled man as I have ever met--and when I began my ministry in that parish, one of the young men in the congregation came to me and told me something like this...."Try as I will, I cannot think of God without thinking of Pastor Banning!" (?)

All of us, while our halo may tilt a bit, and while the halo may still be seen somewhere no matter how dimly, still he has most certainly feet of clay, and it might be a risky thing to equate anyone with their relationship with God; but yet here is this awesome tribute being paid to a man...."I cannot think of God without thinking of him."....and yet that shouldn't be so unusual. Awesome as it may be, it should be the common stuff of which life is made in the Christian experience. For seldom do we have this parting of the heavens, whereby we see God, Spirit-to-spirit----- isn't it always--that God sees fit to use another human being as an instrument? Now, it has pleased God to put you and me here for that purpose--to be His mouthpiece--to tell others about Him, and whatever relationship we may have--that theirs should be a clearer image of God because of us.

On this day so close to Labor Day, with my whole heart and with my whole soul I believe that God has a word to speak to Labor and to Capital. How will that word be spoken? How will His truth be made known? If I understand the plan of God aright, it will be

made known when men sit around the table and where somehow in the discussion there is a voice raised, clearly and strongly, that becomes the very echo of God. I think that's the only way it will happen.

In this day and age when we fear the trigger-happy people in the world....in this day and age, when twenty years after the invasion of Poland, the subject is being discussed again and again in many quarters...."Will there be a third World War?....and how?".... If such a third world war is to be escaped, it will be only by men and women in positions of responsibility who, when the time comes to make the decision, might find themselves in that awesome position whereby the voice of God can be echoed and re-echoed.

One does not forget....that at the peace table in Versailles there was the son of a Presbyterian preacher, who by the grace of God, sought to echo what he felt was the burden of the Lord upon his heart....and sneeringly he was greeted with the words by his comrades...."You talk like Jesus Christ."....But history records that one man did endeavor to speak like Jesus Christ--and to that end was he born....and this is the purpose that you and I may justify, as we take our existence day by day.

I'm not so sure, my friend, that God is reserving for you some great mystic moment, when out of nowhere you will see His face covertly (?) and you will have some moment of ecstasy. I'm not so sure that He's reserving that experience for you and me. But I am certain of this---that in our relationships, one with another, there are some people who have come to know Him so well that if they speak clearly and earnestly, we shall not mistake Him.

I read this passage of Scripture...."And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the

word of the Lord, spoken by Elijah"....and suppose Elijah would not have spoken the word of the Lord?....where would this woman have been?....what might have been her experience?

I am constrained to share this with you....Robertson of Brighton was as fine a preacher as ever produced on English or Scottish soil. He died, they tell me, before he was forty years of age; but he frankly admitted that every time that he went to the pulpit he went with despair, because preaching was a burdensome task for him. But every time Robertson of Brighton went to the pulpit, he went completely possessed by God.

One time there was a man went into a store in Brighton and the man behind the counter, in the course of the conversation, went to a back room and brought out a soiled and well-thumbed picture of the preacher, Robertson of Brighton; and he said to the stranger at the counter...."You never knew him, did you?...But do you know what? ....Every time I find my conscience growing dull concerning the reality of God, I look at Robertson, and I get a fresher glimpse of the Almighty."

Certain things happened to a widow in Zarephath---happened only because one day she met a man, a total stranger; and when he went out of her life, he left with her an abiding sense of the reality of God.

September 13, 1959

"WHOM GOD REPROVES"

The sermon, based upon the Old Testament lesson for the day, is entitled, "Whom God Reproves," and the text is the 17th verse of the 5th chapter of the book of Job:

> "Happy is the man whom God reproves;
> therefore despise not thou the chast-
> ening of the Almighty"

The book of Job is an account of man's attempt to deal with the age-old problem of suffering. Job, for a while, thought he had the answer to his problem. Philosophically, he said, "The Lord gives, the Lord takes away; if we receive good at the hand of the Lord, shall we not also receive evil?" That was Job's initial reaction to his problem--it is submission...."I accept....I have no choice."

Job is right, to a point; but suppose Job would have stopped there, and suppose his friends--the three of them who came time and again to wrestle with him and his problems--suppose they would have stopped at that point?....suppose man, forever, would reach a point of submission and rest his case--what would happen to progress?....what would happen to the stimulation of the mind?...Dare a man raise the question "Why?"...and "How?"....and "To what end?"

They tell me that for centuries there were people who accepted death that came as a result of, say, a typhus--typhoid fever. At a certain time of the year, certain people died, had the same symptoms--and this was it....period. But then there were men who said, "Why do they die?....How does this come about?....What is the cause of this?"....and as they began to probe, progress was stimulated and one new area after another unfolds for man.

Could it be that way also when we deal with this problem of suffering? Is it right and decent and proper for a man to say, "Why should there be suffering?....God, answer me the question!"... ..and then, as though we are impatient with God, we, like Job and his friends, begin to answer.

And so I tell you right now that there are many answers to that question, once man attempts to answer it. The answer that Eliphaz gives, which is the segment of the book of Job which constitutes our text, is not the answer to suffering--it is an answer to suffering--one out of many--and one must be careful to remember that when he hears Eliphaz say, "You should consider yourself happy that you're suffering, because God is chastening you....you're being corrected....and blessed indeed is any man that God will reprove!"

I suppose Eliphaz walked away, stroking his beard rather merrily...."I have the answer!....This is it!....Job, you're being punished--Job, you're being chastised!....God's behind all this!"..... ..and Eliphaz walks away with a degree of satisfaction.

But I warn you, my friend, I'm not so sure that he was entitled to all the satisfaction that he took to his soul--for it is not fair, nor is it right to blame God for all the suffering that happens in the world, nor is it right and proper to say that all the suffering that happens in the world, happens because God wants to punish someone. God does not trip His way merrily through life knowing delight in His soul whenever He finds someone against whom He can bring some kind of punishment. The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not that kind of God.

So, Eliphaz, you're only partly right. You're moving along and that's something, but you don't have the perfect answer--you have

only one answer--and there are many answers to this problem of suffering. God does not cause all suffering. God may allow suffering to take place in his world, but God is not the author of all suffering. None of us would be foolish enough to believe that a grieving father in New York will blame God for the death of his son or his daughter when teen-agers, like beasts, run rampant on the city streets. No one would blame God for snatching away the only child because someone had failed in keeping the stream of water clean--someone had contaminated this spring from which the people drew their drinking water. God may have control of the universe and the world where these things can happen, but one dare not say that God is responsible for every single bit of suffering that takes place in the world, and, furthermore, he dare never say that God takes delight in allowing suffering to exist in order deliberately to punish people.

But, Eliphaz, you have a point. You say...."Happy is the man whom God reproves....happy is the man whom God chastises..."...this thing you have done--you have brought God somewhere upon the horizon --you have brought God into the picture--and for a believer in God, this must always be an essential. No matter what it may be that he must face in life, he must never rule God out of the picture. As to the role that he may have God play, that may be something else, but always God must be somewhere in the picture.

One is reminded of the grieving father whose only son met his death at the time of the sinking of the Titanic. A well-meaning friend thought to comfort and console him, and the father who had lost his son said to him, rather stoutly, now, "Well, I don't believe that God had a thing to do with it"....to which his friend

made reply, "But don't you wish He had?" For don't you see, if God is a part of the picture somewhere, we can get a meaning out of the thing. Whether we like it or not, we may be bent toward some nobler purpose, and if God is not the author, if God is not to blame,--then if God is part of the picture, He might be able to help us and lift us beyond.

Eliphaz, we'll take time this Sunday morning to give your philosophy a sound hearing. What are you telling us?....You're telling us that there is a kind of suffering which God allows because He wants to reprove and correct us. You're telling us, Eliphaz, that God allows suffering to take place because in it and through it the soul of man can be chastened. Do you accept it? Does Eliphaz speak to your condition? Is this one answer, among many, plausible for you?

We do well to remind ourselves that all of us are children of God. Since we are children of God, why should we rule out God's behaviour as a father? One of the prerogatives of fatherhood is to reprove and to correct; and so it could well be that at some time in the stage of our life we may suffer ill fortune, and the misery that we endure may happen to us because in it and through it God wants to see our souls chastened--made pure--something purged out of our lives that ought not to be there.

I can readily understand how some people who run their life pretty much to their own liking and pretty much to their own design, wittingly or unwittingly reach the point where they have no need for God. When something happens that's not very pleasant--when something happens that's quite ugly and even unfair, we cry out against it---and even as we cry out against it, there is the searching of my own soul...some of the impurities that clog my life may be flushed from

it...that I begin to appreciate life anew because of the unpleasant and the ugly and the bitter. God, as my Heavenly Father, may allow it to happen for that purpose--that in and through our reaction to it, I myself may become chastened.

There may be another reason why God may allow suffering to take place as a corrective....because all suffering and ill fortune comes as an interruption--my life now does not go merrily on its way--I have to stop....if it's a virus that puts me low, then for days upon my back, I discover an interruption--and in and through that, a chastening process takes place.

It becomes a healthy and a salutary thing for me to discover that the world goes on without me. That can be for some people a very necessary rebuke to their souls, and that may happen sometimes only if they're forced to go to their backs. All suffering--ill fortune--comes as a kind of interruption to the life that I had planned that would sweep along so merrily.

And when that interruption takes place, I am forced to curtail certain things and then I am reminded of the conductor who stands before his group....have you ever observed the conductor when he comes to that period of the rest?....is he afraid of the rest?...this interruption of the score?.....No--because he knows that there is more to follow and he knows that what happens after the rest has meaning as it's related to what happened before....and even this rest....even this deliberate interruption....makes a specific contribution to the whole score.

Maybe that's the way it is with God and me, when my soul needs rebuke....when I need an interruption....to the life that I had planned....I!! had planned....and God does not trust my wisdom. God is afraid of some of the decisions that I would make--God raises warn-

Sunday, September 13, 1959 Pastor Raymond Shaheen

The sermon for this morning will be based on the Old Testament lesson for the day. The sermon is entitled, "Whom God Reproves" -- the 17th Verse of the 5th Chapter of the Book of Job: Happy is the man whom God

The Book of Job deals with the problem of suffering and man's attempt to understand. As long as there has been such a thing as a thinking man, this problem of suffering moves upon the horizon of his thought. Job, of course, having been

tries to understand it as best he can, and rather philosophically he has already said, The Lord gives; the Lord takes away. If we receive good at the hand of the Lord, should we not also receive evil? That was Job's initial reaction.

There is something admirable about this reaction on the part of Job, but unfortunately, it does not go far enough. Blind submission, mere acceptance of anything in itself is never a salutary thing. They tell me that for centuries there were people who accepted the fact that people just died from typhoid fever

That was all there was to it. In fact, there might have been well-meaning people who might have observed, It is God's will. But suppose people had stopped at that point. Suppose we had not had men of learning and of such great curiosity.

Blind acceptance - passive submission in itself may be good, but only to a point.

While you may end the sermon with Job saying, The Lord giveth; the Lord taketh away; if the Lord gives good, ~~he~~ shall he not also give us evil -- there must be something more.

For two steps at this point: Job's friends did not think they could stop

ing signals about some of the things that I had already decided. So God allows what I call 'misfortune'--the ugly and the unpleasant--to exist, and in it and through it and by it my soul becomes chastened.

Eliphaz, you may not have the whole answer--maybe your answer isn't perfect--but it's one answer that demands respect....and if some of us can get even as far as Eliphaz, we're making progress... ..let suffering, if possible, be understood as rebuke on the part of God....and as I search my soul and as I try to probe as to the meaning of this thing, I myself may experience a kind of chastisement for which the only word I will give you is healthy and necessary.

It would be far simpler, my friend, if I could come to this desk Sunday by Sunday and tell you that whenever you do good, God's going to reward you; it would be a far simpler thing if, every time I came here, I could say...."Every time you do evil, God's going to punish you."....this is simple.

But life is not as simple as that. There are other people in it....and the world does not exist simply for God and for me...and just as I take a pebble and toss it into a brook or any stream of w water--so the ripple goes on endlessly, forever troubled, to a degree at least, by this apparent toss....so all the evil that happens in the world can affect me, no matter how righteous I may decide to become.

Says God...."When suffering and misfortune become your lot, happy indeed will you be if you can see it as a opportunity by which your soul can be chastened; because when it happens that way, I will redeem you--I will rescue you from it--I have made you bigger than the thing itself"....and we might be able to say with the Apostle Paul..."Now I know that <u>all</u> things can work for good to them who love the Lord." "...and who knows better than I the severity of God's reproof - and when I am made aware of the unhappiness to those given me to love, because of my failings - I must thank Him for bringing me my short"

at that point. So they come each in turn and each thinks he has a right to say, But why are you suffering? What does have in mind in your affliction? Now Eliphaz says: I think I have the answer. You are suffering because it is God's responsibility to correct you. And by the suffering that is coming to you now and that you are enduring, you are enduring because God sees fit to chasten. Now whatever else you might say about Eliphaz you must give him credit for trying to find an answer. Now bear that in mind. This word (?) of the t ext is one answer in man's attempt to solve the problem of suffering. We were to make a mistake if we were to say, This is the answer, or This is the perfect answer. This is one answer among many. And to the everlasting credit of Eliphaz, he brings God into the picture. Happy is the man whom God corrects, whom God will chasten.

One is reminded of the remark made by a father whose only son met his death with the sinking of the . A friend came to console him in his grief and the man whose son had perished stoutly replies: I do not believe God has anything to do with it at all. And the man replied to the grieving father, But don't you wish he had? Man gets some measure of comfort when he knows that somewhere looming upon the horizon there is the figure of God.

That is the contribution that Eliphaz makes -- he brings God into the picture and he says, God allows it for this reason. We would make a mistake, of course, if we were to think for a single minute that all suffering is caused by God. Eliphaz does not say that, but there are some people who think that whatever happens happens because God .wills it. This is not true. God may allow a word to exist where suffering may have its day, and Job is perfectly right when he says, The Lord gave; the Lord takes; there is evil; there is good. There is sunshine and there is shadow; there is peace and there is pain; there is poverty and there is plenty. Because of the kind of word in which we live, this is true. But to say that behind every bit of suffering, God himself is the , is to be unfair with God and unkind, to say the least, and Eliphaz, mark you, himself is not saying this -- that God is behind all suffering. But he says, there is a kind of

suffering which God himself specifically permits for a purpose. And if this kind of suffering should ever happen to you and to me, then we are in duty bound to seek God himself as to the reason for it, and the purpose that is being served. One must be very careful when he brings God into the picture.

For instance, where is the man among us who would go to the Christian faith (?) in Manhattan or in any of the five boroughs of New York where hoodlums are running rampant at the present time and say to one of the Christian faith, Your son is gone; this is the will of God. As long as some teen-agers run rampant as beasts, who is the man foolish among us who would say, This is the will of God. Or that we should be blind to the factors that contribute to men -- young men -- who grow up as within the areas of a great city?

One dare not say -- with blanket coverage -- all suffering is created [illegible]. and offered by God. One dare say, We live in a word where suffering may be allowed by God. Then you may even get to the point where Eliphaz says, And God specifically allows some kind of suffering that man might be chastened and corrected.

Now the responsibility comes to you and to me to search our minds and to trace (?) our thoughts to discover if the suffering that I must endure is that kind of suffering. If I abide with the where I am willing to believe that God allows me to suffer because he wants to correct, then I shall be, as Eliphaz says, "a blessed man -- happy indeed is that man whom God corrects."

Now, what underlies this kind of philosophy, and why is it that a man could accept it under certain circumstances and conditions? In the first place, a man must remember that we are God's children and if we are God's children, we dare not deny God the perogative of fatherhood, and one of the perogatives of fatherhood is to reprove and to correct. Sometimes the only way God can do that is to allow me to suffer. That is basic. I am God's child; God is my father; a good father will reprove and a good father will correct.

One of the unfortunate things about our generation may be that there is divided authority in the home, and that the father is no longer looked upon as the

head of the house, and as the head of the house, the one to whom such great responsibility should be dealed specifically. Now as we read the pages of history, we discover that there are children of faith who find time and time again that God allows certain things to happen because he is not given the perogative of fatherhood. Can you love a God who would not chastise and rebuke? Can you really love, honor and obey a God who would not interfere in your life when chastening is the necessary thing? I do not trust my wisdom, and if I were to plan my own course, heaven itself knows how deplorable my end may be, and God as a wise Heavenly father intervenes from time to time.

in order that God may chasten and God may correct. Happy indeed will you be if the kind of suffering you endure is this kind of suffering.

Eliphaz says, I will tell you why you can think that way: Because your kind suffering wont last forever. God is allowing this to happen only so long as it is necessary to chasten you and to correct you, and once this has happened, God will alleviate and God will right the situation. Happy indeed will you be, says Eliphaz, if your kind of suffering is this kind of suffering because God himself will help you. God will allow it to continue for a while, but while it continues God will reprove you and correct you and you become stronger in the end.

Read again this Old Testament lesson for today, and Eliphaz having laid down the reason he thinks why God allows a just man to suffer, gives the support to his views. God will bind you up; God will make you whole and even give you good years; God will not suffer the evil

This is Job's bit of philosophy given to him by a friend who tries to solve the problem of suffering.

It would
If it be such a simple thing for me -- if I could come to this place Sunday after Sunday to tell you, Anyone who does good, God will bless and anyone who does evil, God will curse. It is as simple as all that. But life is never a simple thing, and each of us finds himself living his years, caught up in this millstone of Evil and Good, and all of these come out against us.

Some of the suffering I have to endure, I have to endure, not because of God, but because of the misbehavior of one , but even sometimes God will allow that because my soul is at stake.

It is not for me to tell you in your affliction, in your misery, in your ill fortune, just why it has happened. But I can suggest to you that, as a child of God, you search your heart and see if there is cause for God to chasten and to correct you.

This, too, I know about suffering, that when it happens, it is always an interruption. My life heretofore going on merrily is suddenly stopped. Some men have to go to bed; some men are kept from their offices. There is an interruption. John Ruskin once observed how a conductor treating a musical score recognizes the rest. The rest in the musical score in itself has no meaning whatsoever, but because it is there, it lends meaning to all that went on before and all that is to follow. John Ruskin suggests that we look upon life in that way. Then we might have our forced interruption, that we do not recognize then, as the conductor with the score in front of him who is not afraid of the rest because he knows it is not a final thing -- there is more to follow and what follows has added significance because of that interruption.

It could be, therefore, if God allows me to suffer, if God is reproving me and correcting me, he has forced this interruption in my life that it might serve a noble purpose.

What are the purposes served by such chastisement from interruption? The most salutary (?) thing that could happen is that once they are forced upon their back, that business in this world goes on as usual. Sometimes the healthiest thing for some people's ego is to discover that once they have been absent from the office, the work goes on just the same. The healthiest thing that can happen for some people when they are forced by an interruption in their regular schedule is to suddenly discover that the they are enjoying are at the hand of God, and the

they have upon others than themselves.

We may consider ourselves fortunate indeed if the suffering that we experience is coming our way that God may reprove us and correct us. The New Testament has never lost sight of this. The Apostle Paul was able to say, I know that all things work together for good to them that love the Lord. The important thing for you and for me is to so root and ground ourselves in faith, seeing ourselves always as God's children. Then we need not fear anything for when it does come to pass, God as a Heavenly Father stands in the shadow, being mindful of his own.

# # # #

September 20, 1959

A WORD FITLY SPOKEN

The sermon is entitled, "A Word Fitly Spoken," and the text is from the Old Testament lesson for the day. It is the 11th verse of the 25th chapter of the Book of Proverbs:

> "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver"

I do not presume to tell you right now just what the writer of Proverbs had in mind when he used this description--that a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. Is he trying to tell us that that's about the perfect way to portray apples?--to make them as gold and to put them within a picture of silver?--is he trying to tell us that, once done like this, it becomes clear and concise and complete--that this would be the perfect way of portraying it? That I cannot tell you.

But I am not much concerned this morning with his description...I am greatly intrigued by his opening words..."A word fitly spoken"...and the writer of Proverbs does us a service in calling to our attention that words, when used, should be used wisely and well; and in the plan of God, words are terribly important, and language itself can be understood as a gift from God.

When we read the Bible, again and again we are forced to recognize the significance of this statement. Let me recite for you now, very briefly, some of the passages of Scripture that deal with words and their relationship to God:

> "O Lord, open Thou my lips and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise"

> "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer"

One remembers the parting command of Jesus Christ to his disciples: "Go!.....Teach!.....Tell others!".....

One also remembers...."Let the redeemed of the Lord say so"....and then this injunction....it should come as a necessary refreshment to your mind--heed it now!...."Every idle word that a man shall speak, he shall be held accountable thereof in the Day of Judgment."

Ah! There you have it!----In the sight of God words are important!...in the sight of God, we ought never to use them unless they can become worthy of God's blessing....in the sight of God, each of us shall be held responsible, in the Day of Judgment, for the way we use, misuse, or abuse these words. How different than the casual reaction that you and I have with words--for some of us they come so easily--we speak so glibly....words. And yet it could be said, and I think you could establish a case for it, that one of the most important tools that God has given to any of us is the tool of language--the ability and the capability by which to speak--to communicate with others.

It is one of those great things, you see, that distinguishes us from the animal kingdom as such. We have so much in common with the animals; and while they have some kind of signals with each other, these animals that crawl...and climb...and fight one another... beget.....but it's reserved for man--made by God a little lower than the angels--to be able to communicate, one with the other--to make his thoughts become an expression of him...

I come to this sacred desk this morning, completely awe-struck by the gift of language and the use of words. When I have had a holiday and I have been able to go to New York City, I look forward to worshiping in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity. Again and again I have gone there and I have sat at the feet of men standing in that pulpit, to the edification of my soul.

Of all the times that I've gone there, I found myself saying to myself, "If only I could have been present on one Sunday morning in particular"--oh, maybe two or three decades ago now, when Dr. Paul Sherer, the prince among preachers, had returned to his pulpit after some months of enforced absence--a pesky throat affliction had brought him to a halt (?), and by doctors' orders he was kept out of the pulpit and was limited in the use of words, and for weeks, they tell me, could not speak at all....I should like so much to have been there that Sunday when he returned to that pulpit--when the congregation was struck with the significance of the fact that now they should hear this eloquent servant of God again. And what do you suppose was his text?....for him there could be only one text----"O Lord, open Thou my lips and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise."

I got a copy of that sermon and I have read it again and again with much profit. The opening sentence goes something like this.... "The writer of this text is a man who asks for only one privilege---the privilege to speak, and when he speaks, to praise God." Who knows, with the gift of language bestowed upon us by God, this shall be the highest use to which it shall be put. Ah....a word fitly spoken.

I'd like to talk to you now for a little bit about three different things in relationship to this matter of words. First of all, let's remind ourselves of the purpose of words. Words serve this purpose--they allow us to crystalize our thinking in order to make our thought articulate. Someone has rightfully said, "You never really know a thing until you can say it." That, at least, seems to be the justification for written and oral examinations, doesn't it? No instructor takes for granted that his pupils have mastered the material ....ah, they shall be given the opportunity to put it into words--and

that's why, unto the end of time, in any educational system that we have, we'll always have an examination--we go on the theory that you do not know a thing until you can put it into words. The purpose of words is to allow us to crystalize our thoughts and to make our thoughts become articulate.

The purpose of words also allows us to communicate what we think and what we know to other people, and again I say to you---maybe we don't know what it is until we can say it. You may smile a bit now, but there's something to be said about the little girl who said,.... "How do I know what I think, until I first hear what I have to say?" For some folks, that's perfectly true. The purpose of words--to crystalize our thoughts---to make our thoughts articulate---to be able to communicate with others.

Let me talk with you a little bit now about another matter--the power of words. Dr. George Buttrick one time had a little while to spend between trains in a mid-western city and he followed some of the people in that community, while he waited his several hours, to the local high school auditorium--it was commencement time--and he was somewhat impressed with the array of graduates and the solemnity of the occasion; but the one thing that enthralled him was something that he found written as a motto above the arch in the auditorium---three words---DEEDS, NOT WORDS. Dr. Buttrick said he felt like standing up and charging against the people and saying..."This is not true---this is a half-truth---this is almost a falsehood---to say that deeds alone matter and words are not important!"....

Ah, but don't you see, my friend, deeds and words sometimes can become equated, for words <u>are</u> deeds--they are the deeds of the lips--just as the carving of a statue is the deed of a man's hands---just

like the painting of a picture becomes the deed of a man's fingers--just like the making of a dress becomes the deed of the hands of the seamstress....so the words that we speak are the deeds and the acts of our lips....they are important....they are powerful.

The word can capture the imagination of men's minds--they are so powerful that they can form the reaction of people....what was it that went throbbing through the hearts of men and women in World War #I....what was it that made men and women willing to pay the price of sacrifice?....someone had coined a phrase--someone had found some words that went marching straight into the hearts and minds of the American people...."to make the world safe for democracy"....they kept saying it and saying it and repeating it and repeating it..... and one sacrifice was made after another because of the power of those words.

I suppose that if there were a way of measuring it, men and women could say that a certain change in tempo took place in the mind and spirit of the American people after the rendezvous of Churchill and Roosevelt in the North Atlantic during World War #2, and they came back with the Atlantic Charter, and then we were told that we were fighting for the "Four Freedoms"....and again and again we kept repeating those words..."The Four Freedoms"..."The Four Freedoms"....

Ah, words are powerful....Mr. Khrushchev knows that. He has kept some of us, you see, going back to the television sets as often as we may have time--and he is a master at words--and he is painting all kinds of pictures.....and there he is...he can speak freely and to the point...he can turn almost anything to his own liking. Some of us are beginning to believe that his visit to the United States is serving a worthy purpose if it doesn't do anything else but allow us to see how a Communist speaks. Here is a man completely dedicated to

what he believes, and he knows what he believes, and he is able to say it....and if he achieves any kind of victory in the visit here, it will be by the use of his words.

So powerful are words....words have power to curse....words have power to challenge....words have power to condemn. I grew up in a small town--I know what whispering tongues can do. I know some homes that have been hurt, and they've never again been the same because someone started a malicious campaign, and the seeds of doubt have brought their terrible harvest of lies and the unwillingness on the part of some people to give somebody else the benefit of the doubt.

Words are powerful things....Gamaliel Bradford, in his book, "Damaged Souls", tells about how some men became clever enough and adept in the use of language, that they actually destroyed some men--they assaulted their characters....not physically...not with violence ...but by the things they said about them--character assassination---so powerful can a word become.

The last thing that I want to tell you about words is not only their purpose and their power, but something now again about their proper use...."a word fitly spoken"....We're able to speak and communicate with others because God gives us that power. Now any gift that comes from God should bear (bare?) something of His character and His Spirit. God is Love...God is Truth...and since God bestows the gift of speech upon us, this gift is never rightly and properly used unless the word that we speak breathes and indicates something of the love and the truth of God.

Did it ever occur to you how much time Jesus spent here on earth--just talking to people....the stranger He met at the well...the fishermen He met by the boat....the little cluster of people bartering in the village square....the crowds of people who assembled---He took

advantage of almost every opportunity that came His way to talk with people. Now after He had talked with people, some of them tried to remember what He said--they were completely captivated by the use of His words. Some of those men put those things down in writing--and as they recalled the words of Jesus, they couldn't much recall whether He talked about the economic order or not....they couldn't much recall whether He talked a great deal about politics....they couldn't recall whether He talked about the weather.....but they did remember that when He did talk and He would finish, men were given an unforgetable picture about God's love and His truth....and all because when Jesus came, "He opened His mouth and He taught them, saying....."

Unashamedly, I tell you I come to this place awe-struck....Sunday by Sunday, by the Grace of God, I am to stand, and for some fifteen or twenty minutes, by the use of words, I am charged by God to do some noble thing. No word is ever fitly used--no word is ever properly spoken--if somehow the tone and the overtone of it should not reveal something of the love and the truth of God.

I once knew a man who was told that he had an incurable disease--he knew very well that his days were numbered; and one time my friend was walking down the street on a most unpleasant and ugly day, and my friend greeted the first passer-by that came with, "Good morning, sir," ....and the passer-by railed upon him and said, "What's good about it?" ....and my friend simply replied, "When your days are numbered, any day is a good one."

My friend, if perchance your words and mine were to be numbered.. ...if in the plan of God, we, some day, should be denied the capability of speech....could it be that we would have made such wise use of the remaining opportunity?

"A Word Fitly Spoken"--8

I have known some people whose lives have been changed because of what someone said to them. To the day I die, and as God gives me memory, I shall be grateful for the man who one day said something to me that shaped the path of my life.

"... and words, once they are spoken, have served their purpose - but they may never be recalled - never forgotten ..." Thoughts on the Sermon

A WISE CHOICE

> "And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king: Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like. (II Chronicles:I:11,12)

It is always a great moment when a person is made aware of the presence of God. There is nothing in this life that can match it. It is, you see, something out of this world. It happened to Solomon. And when it happened to Solomon, Solomon recognized himself in this most fortunate of all positions.

God, who appears to him, does not appear as one who chastises and rebukes....God, who appears to him, does not appear as one who speaks kind and soft words....God appears to him as one whose hand is outstretched and says...."Take what you will--what is it that you would like?" This is an exceedingly wonderful thing--to be made aware of the Presence of God, and then to understand that God, having the whole world in the hollow of His hand, says...."What will you have?"

It's an unfortunate analogy, I'll grant you....but I can remember, as a youngster, the thrill that came over my soul when, at a certain season of the year, we'd write letters to a certain person--to a certain person, a figment of our imagination, as we put it, who would be busy in his workshop the whole year round--who had an endless row of shelves--and on these shelves, everything conceivable and almost inconceivable. Now what one would have to do was just write a letter and mail it and then with our whole heart we believed that maybe we might get it.

The analogy is a poor one. For God is not like Santa Claus. This God whom we love and whom we serve and worship is one to be held in awe--He is not a doting grandfather who just because He wants to make His children happy, gives them anything that they might want; but for the moment, however, recognize the position in which Solomon found himself. Believing that God is King above all kings and God has the whole world within His reach....and God says to His servant, "What can I do for you?"....It is as awesome and as wonderful as that!

What will a man take? The whole world is always watching..... for what a man chooses reveals his character. Tell me what a man will take from a person....tell me what a man will take from a single day.. ..tell me what a man will take from a single opportunity....and I'll tell you what that man basically is.

Life is always giving us an endless round of choices. God stands for life itself, for life is always saying..."Name it...What will you take from it?" Once a man chooses, he always eliminates something, and the choice that is actually made is enhanced when one recognizes the things that were not chosen.

Now, for a moment, consider the things that Solomon passed by. Of all the things that he might have desired from the hand of God, these are the things he did not choose....He did not say, "God, first and foremost, let me live out my years and crown them with old age."

Now let me tell you, for the old Jew, this was a consummation devoutly to be wished for, for the old Jew always felt that long life was a sign of God's favor--that if God did not strike a man down in the tender years of his life, and if He did not take him in the prime of his life, but allowed him to go on living more than three score years and ten....God surely was smiling upon that person. Solomon might have asked for that...."Let me live a good long life, O God"....

..that's all I ask....but this Solomon did not do.

Solomon might have chosen riches and wealth--and many people would desire it....to always have enough to go around and a little bit remaining--ah, this is a happy thought--and for some of us who become at a certain age in our life, security-minded--what comfort and peace of mind you would have....if you always knew, come wind or weather, a balance in the bank would remain....what a man could not do with the things of this earth--and to have the cup filled to the brim--and over-flowing--riches and wealth...."O God, let me have this from life!"... ..take from me the curse of poverty".....Solomon, even as a king, did not ask for these things.

As a king, he might have desired from the hand of God prestige and honor--what that wouldn't do to his kingdom--to have everyone on the face of the whole world look up to him. Prestige and honor in themselves become a very valuable thing.

Or to ask the life of those who were his enemies--he who sits upon a throne always sits comfortably when he knows that there's no one anywhere who can threaten him--and Solomon, who wanted to be a good king, might have asked for this....but for none of these things did Solomon ask. Why? Aren't they good? Of course they are good. In themselves, they can be eminently worthwhile....to be able to live long and well--the gift of life itself is a precious thing....to have wealth and honor--prestige and position--these things in themselves are not evil--they can be good..... but to the everlasting credit of Solomon.. ...here is wisdom that is not content with making a choice that just happens to be good, when one can choose a better thing.

The better part of wisdom is always to take the best if the best is possible. For shame upon us when so often we make choices....we

dibble and dabble around with things that are not quite as important and pass by things far more important, but the better part of wisdom is always good--to choose the better, when even the good is available--and to take the best, when one might be content with the better. This is the finer part of wisdom--always to look for the best possible thing and to take that....and so Solomon did.

For what could long life mean to him, if he could not live it wisely and well? What would wealth and honor mean to him, if he did not have the wisdom by which to use this wealth and honor? This is the better gift--wisdom by which to use anything that might come to you in life, for without wisdom, anything of itself could turn out to be just good.

One thinks, and not facetiously so, of the preacher who was handed a note one time, and the note simply said..."Will you please remember in your prayers a man in this congregation who is becoming increasingly wealthy"....pray for a man who is becoming increasingly wealthy! Pray for him that, amid his wealth, he might have wisdom to use his wealth aright!

It could also be...."Remember in your prayers one who enjoys a good measure of health"....It is not enough to pray for people who are sick, but also pray for one who is well, that in all the good health that he enjoys, he might use this good health wisely and well, to the glory of God and to the betterment of his fellow-man. Life itself, riches, honor, wealth, prestige---these can be meaningless, if one does not have the wisdom by which to invest, in God's name, in life itself.

So Solomon made the choice....and when Solomon made the choice, you must remember he was aware of the fact of God--he was aware of the fact that when God appeared, God offered him something--he was aware

that when God offered him something, his was still the responsibility to take what he would from the hand of God. God does not jam anything, no matter how good it may be, down any man's throat. What God offers is good--man must pray for wisdom to take the best that's offered from the hand of God.

Perhaps, by implication, you've caught already the significance of this sermon. It's been prepared especially and it's being preached, with those who serve the cause of Christian Education in mind. On this Sunday when we recognize our teachers and workers, we ought not to lose sight of the fact that every Sunday when they come---what are they doing?....The question should be raised. They are seeking to impress upon the minds of those who come to them the facts of God....that they must do business with God....and when they meet God, God will offer them something, and when God offers them something, they ought ask for the best possible thing that can come from the hand of God.

I am perfectly aware that great events sometime make common ordinary things seem trivial. I am perfectly aware of the fact that this morning at Camp David--not too many miles away from this community, two men, representing the most influential nations on the face of the earth, have come together. The world is waiting to hear what they have discussed--in what spirit they have discussed it--and what might come of it.

And yet I say to you this morning, important as that meeting may and can be, ought we not to recognize the fact that, Sunday after Sunday, whenever a Sunday School teacher meets with a cluster of pupils, you have an event--an occasion--as important, if not more important, than when two men get together. For these two men may run the risk of exercising the wisdom of this world with the problems that

they must face. They may be able to take only a horizontal point of view.....but Sunday by Sunday, whenever a Sunday School teacher meets with a class of pupils, no matter how small it may be, under God, that Sunday School teacher has the great obligation to introduce to the ppeople a vertical point of view--that gives meaning to the horizontal. ....How does this thing that you might do some day in life stack up with the wisdom of God? This is the great responsibility of the Sunday School teacher--of the Sunday School worker--to introduce the mind of the people to the fact of God....that God looms upon the horizon, and that whatever choices a person may make in life from that time on, must be made according to the wisdom and the pleasure of God----else all other things could be

Without hesitation, I would always take off my hat to a Sunday School teacher--I would always give them the reverence and respect that becomes them. Whether you care to acknowledge the truth or not, it can be that in your home, the Sunday School teacher has more influence, spiritually, than what you may have, as far as the teaching of the Word of God is concerned. If you can bring to your child instruction in the Holy Word, day by day....if you can honestly say that you've introduced your child to more passages of Scripture than the Sunday School teacher has.....unfortunately, yet thank God for the it is the Sunday School teacher who again and again introduces some children more so to the Word of God than any other single person--during a particular phase in their lives.

I don't know how often Dwight David Eisenhower went to Sunday School or who his Sunday School teacher may have been, but I should like to think that he's being surrounded today by all those who've influenced his life forever....and if not on this earth, surely from

heaven above, there is the prayer being made...."Dwight David Eisenhower, in this conference that you have, discharge your obligation and offer your recommendations and your contributions as worthy of the smile of God's favor....How does this thing that you now suggest seem wise to God?".....

This is our purpose in life--this is our great responsibility--Solomon was wise enough to ask it...."God, this is what I want to be given-- the capability by which I can make decisions as worthy of your favor"....the only thing that matters now, because some day, in the final analysis, we stand before Him who is the Judge of all, and the standard of judgment will not be ours--it will be His.

Maybe it's high time that we get ourselves around to the place where we begin to think in terms of standards and judgments that are pleasing in God's sight. My friend, it is not an easy task, and the wisdom of God comes to those who desire it....."What do you want, Solomon?....Name it!".....And we refer to the wisdoms of the Solomons--the wisdom that was Solomon's was his because he took it in the Mind and Spirit of God.

GOD'S OPEN HAND"

On this day that marks the Festival of the Harvest, the sermon is entitled, "God's Open Hand," and the test is the 15th and 16th verses of Psalm 145:

> "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them
> their meat in due season.
> Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of
> every living thing."

I know the reactions. You're thinking as you listen to these words --these words...'thou openest Thy hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing'...well presumably that man didn't talk to very many people. This is not a man who has taken a Gallup-like poll--who's gone from person to person and said, "Do you have everything that you'd like? Do you believe that God takes care of all of your needs?"

Surely a man who had put a question like that, person to person, as he met people anywhere, would not always come back with an affirmative answer. This is not the experience of everyone. Let it be understood at the very beginning that the words of this text constitute the recital of one man's experience, and not necessarily the experience of everyone. True as these words may be as you find them in the Bible, they are not true for everyone.

This is a man, if you want to put it this way, who was something of a poet--with the poetic character of his own soul had looked out upon the world. To him it was fair and wonderful, and behind everything he saw God's outstretched hand, and God's outstretched hand was never empty. There was always enough in it for him and he was satisfied. We will be perfectly safe, it seems to me, if we begin by realizing this is the experience of one man and is not necessarily the experience of everyone.

But how was it that it was his experience? Why could one man, out of any number of people, say, "Why God, your hand is outstretched and your hand is never empty, and it satisfies the desires, the needs, of everyone."....How could he talk like that?

Well maybe he lived in the day when life was very simple--not nearly as complex as our day. Maybe it's because his was a generation of people who lived next to the soil. He could see the field from which his wheat would be harvested....he could see the place where the grain would be threshed....he could see how the flour was brought to his own house....he could see how his wife, perhaps, would bake the bread.... he could see the cow from which the milk would come....he lived so close to nature itself and so close to the soil--maybe that's one reason why he ~~can~~ could speak that way.

This morning when you had your breakfast--today when you'll have your meals, you'll sit down to your table--and you'll suffer, my friend, from a delusion....the bread in front of you you will associate all too quickly, unless you're fortunate enough to have a baker in your house, that bread you associate all too quickly with the counter from which you got it; and then you'll think perhaps of the delivery man who brought it to the store; and then, if you think in terms of bread, you may think in terms of the complex financial structure of our world--where ~~men~~ money was necessary to buy wheat at particular times, and where one store-house was built up after another and where the bakery was financed.

Ah, yes, you see, you may suffer from a delusion because when you think of bread, if you're a financier you think of the finances involved in getting that bread to your table; if you're a delivery man, you think in terms of a union in getting that loaf of bread to the store and from the store into your home; if you're a clerk, you think in terms of all

the headaches that are involved in satisfying the customer who wants a particular kind of bread at a particular time.

We suffer from a delusion. In this highly complex order of which we are a part it becomes quite difficult for us to see behind whatever portion of food it is that's in front of me--the bare...raw...open hand of God.

But for the Psalmist living so close to the soil--living next to nature itself--behind whatever food it was that was spread before him, is the hand of God. That's one reason why this church returns to an ancient custom in celebrating, at least annually, the Festival of the Harvest. That's one reason why in this place of prayer, this house of God, you find visible tokens--a tangible evidence on these window ledges--at the altar--in the narthex--of the fruits of the earth....that we might be able to remember that it is by the hand of the Lord that we are fed....that this God of ours is the Great Provider. This we dare not forget.

Happy indeed will you be if when you look upon these food stuffs--these fruits of the earth--you might remember some plot of ground that you tilled....some piece of earth that you cultivated....some seed that you handled with your own hand....some potatoes that you perhaps gathered from the good earth yourself....some apple that you plucked from the tree. ...happy indeed will you be if these things can remind you of the whole thing of which they are part; and that itself will take you back to the very basic fact that behind it all is God.

I think the Psalmist must have been able to speak like that..."thou openest Thy hand and satifiest the desire of every living thing"....because he lived near to nature and close to the good earth. We run the risk of suffering from a delusion; and the purpose of this Festival of the Harvest is to turn our thoughts back--and I will say it again...to

the raw...bare...hand of God, outstretched and never empty.

I think the Psalmist was able to speak this way, too, because he must have been a man who was satisfied with little things. That is not always true for us. We live in a complex society. We are tremendously interested in the big things in our life. We want so much in the homes where we live--one gadget after another--one type of convenience after another. The Psalmist was satisfied with a roof over his head...the Psalmist was satisfied with four walls to surround him...the Psalmist was satisfied with plain unmitigated, unadulterated bread.

I think he must have been the kind of person who, because he had poet's blood coursing through his veins, could look out upon the stars at night and see them as the eyes of God--brilliant--twinkling as they may be--and when he saw them, he whispered..."God." When he thought even of the heavens itself, he said, "This is God's canopy over all the earth."

And I think he must have been someone who, when he looked upon the earth itself, he said, "Even this is held in the hollow of God's hand," and because that was true for him, no matter how little it was that might have happened in the course of a day--one tiny raindrop was something that came from heaven....if the air should be muggy, that made no difference to him--it was still air that he could breathe, even with difficulty.....and behind it was God.

I think he must have been satisfied with looking upon the simpler things and satisfied that even God, by dealing out in little things, would guarantee that all that he ever wanted would be his, if what he wanted he would need in God's name.

S. S. Kresge was a Pennsylvanian who lived in a small town in the shadow of a much larger city. They tell me to the day that he died, for his Sunday night meal--for his Sunday night meal he was perfectly content

with nothing but a bowl of bread and milk--with all his millions he had come to appreciate the fact that here was a simple fare--here was a simple diet--and they tell me that in it and through that there was an indication in the fact that, for him--bread and milk--simple fare--was made possible by Him who was the giver of all good things.

I think the Psalmist should have said...."Why God, it's your hand that's open--it's your hand that's empty,"...and he said it because he lived near to nature and he was interested in being grateful for little things.

Now what does this say to you and to me today? It means, first of all, that we ought to get rid of this delusion by which, when we think of bread, we think in terms only of a complex technical and commercial world in which we live. Happy indeed will we be if we can see behind bread the hand of God, no matter what the bread may be that comes to your table.

And the second thing is to recognize the fact that it is by God's hand that we are provided. By God? This table that is spread forth before me is made possible by Him who is the Father of all of the children on the face of the earth, and whatever I may harvest, I may harvest because God has seen fit to allow the harvest to come to pass.

Has it ever occurred to you that when God made the world--the earth--He so made it that there would always be food enough--for all of His children. Now some might have more than others--but the world has been so designed by the mind of God that there will always be enough. Whether or not those who do not have will get from those who have becomes the responsibility of those who have. God has seen fit that when the earth was made, that harvest should follow seed-time. The wind, the rain and the good earth itself would bring forth a yield.

Now that means if I have in front of me I should take my soul to task and I should ask myself the question--I, who benefit so much from the harvest--could it be that what I have in front of me is far more than others who do not have?

I take my soul to task when I remember what Herbert Hoover said after World War I, as the great food administrator, the great benefactor for starving Europeans in the face of America--at that time a statistic had been established, in one way or another--that America collectively sent to the garbage pail, each day, one million dollars' worth of food. If that statistic could have been true then, think what it would be now!

Now what does one make of that sort of thing? One simply is forced to recognize the fact that he does live here in America, in the land of abundance, and it could be a downright shameful, wicked thing if, gathering the fruits of the harvest, I should take what God allows me to have at my table and have no concern whatsoever for the other half of the world that goes to bed hungry.

Oh, I could have come to this desk this morning and talked to you about the red in the cheek of the apple; and I could come to this desk and talk to you about the gold that's found in the glow of the wheat; and I could talk to you something about the autumnal glory that's found in the flowers that grace the altar; but these things I cannot do. On any Sunday that marks the Festival of the Harvest, we who take the name of Christ and claim to be God's children have no right to concern ourselves with the abundance that's placed in front of us without also having some concern to the fact that half of the world goes hungry.

Maybe there are two things that we ought to do on this day that marks the Festival of the Harvest. Maybe we ought to examine our own minds to the degree that we come out convinced that what we have is by

God's hand; and, at the same time, we ought to come out convinced that what we have belongs to all of God's children and that no man has a right to eat any food, comfortably or easily, as long as somewhere in the world someone else is hungry.

I would ask you, therefore, on the day that marks the Festival of the Harvest, to concern yourself with the other people who are waiting to sit down at God's table, and ask yourself the question, in the face of your abundance...."How substantial might their fare be?"

We suffer from a delusion, my friend. Sometimes we think we're the only ones who go to God's table. That's why we complain so easily. We are only an infinitesimal factor of those for whom God rings the dinner bell.

"Thou openest Thy hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing"....that's what the Psalmist said. And I like to think that he never thanked God for what he had without remembering those who did not have.

May I suggest a table grace for you--a very simple one...."O Lord, let not the abundance of the food placed in front of us keep us from being mindful of those who do not have."

Sermon October 18, 1959

IN THE TRADITION OF SAINT LUKE

The giving of a name is always a very important thing. And then when one begins to realize the meaning of the name he bears, well, that too is equally significant. When a child comes into this world, or when a child is presented for the Sacrament of Infant Baptism, the officiating minister, as he reaches for this child and is about to take this child into the crook of his arm, may properly say to the parents, "And how shall this child be named?" The naming of a child, the naming of a thing, the naming of a congregation, must be an exceedingly wonderful thing.

I wish sometimes that I could have been ( ) pastor of Saint Luke Church--back there in the fall of 1939, when that handful of men and women had gathered together with a fervent desire to see established in Silver Spring such a thing as should become Saint Luke Church. They must have had very many exciting meetings....and I'm wondering how exciting the meeting must have been when someone said, "Now we shall choose a name."

Do you ever wonder how it was that this congregation was called Saint Luke Church? Of all the names that could have been chosen, why this one? In a telephone conversation yesterday morning with one of the members of Saint Luke--one also a charter member--I said to her, "Could you tell me how it happened that Saint Luke was chosen?" Well her answer was (

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known as Saint Luke, Evangelist Day, we should have more than ordinary interest in Saint Luke--the man behind our name. What can I

tell you about him? I'll begin with this fact--he was not one of the twelve. When our Lord was here on earth, choosing twelve people to be with Him so intimately, to benefit so directly from all that He taught and all that He was, Luke was not among them. Luke came later on the scene. Now this is unusually significant. For Luke has become the most versatile of all the men of the early church. Let me tell you why I can say this.

He was, to begin with, a doctor. Now there were not very many doctors in that day and not very many of them became followers of Jesus Christ, for one reason or another. Luke is a physician who decided to become a doctor to the soul as well as to the body. He was the companion of Paul, spending several years with him on his missionary journeys, and a good segment of that time he spent in prison along with Paul.

This most versatile of all leaders of the early church is a writer--a writer not only of the Gospel that carries his name but, as you well know, also the writer of that very fine treatise that gives us an excellent glimpse into the life and spirit of the early church--the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Luke, this most versatile of all figures of the early church, is the only Gentile to be a New Testament writer. He was not a Jew.

Now when you take all of these things together, you ask yourself the question, "Well how was it possible for a man who was not numbered among the twelve to make so great a contribution to the Christian religion, even at the very beginning of the Christian church?"

This is a very good question. How was it possible for a man--even as the author of the text which can serve as a general basis for this sermon, the 9th verse of the 10th chapter of the Gospel of Luke: "The Kingdom of God is nigh,"---how could a man say that....who had not been

touched personally and directly while Jesus Christ was here on the earth?

I'm happy to tell you that, for the most part, what Luke received about Jesus Christ he got from somebody else and did not hesitate to pass it on. And I'm also happy to tell you that when Luke got this Gospel about Christ from somebody else, he was not satisfied to take it simply second-hand. Now this is terribly important, because this is what happens so often for most of us--we take what somebody else has said and we subscribe to it and accept it as true because we trust the people who told it.

God have pity upon us when the day comes that we cannot trust something as being true because first of all we trust the bearer of the good news. But God also have mercy upon us if we simply accept what's given to us and fail to pass through an experience by which this thing which we now believe becomes an expression of belief out of our own experience.

This is the first thing that Saint Luke, it seems to me, would speak to us if he were standing in the pulpit of this congregation this morning...."You who take my name--let me tell you--that what I passed on to other people and what I proclaimed as the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I proclaimed because it was first given to me, but I did not stop there--I re-discovered that truth for myself!".....so much so, that when the Gospel that was written by Luke was finally put on paper, it is not a Gospel according to somebody else--Luke, with complete candor, could say, "This is the Gospel according to me....this truth I have re-discovered for myself....what they have told me about God in Christ I know to be true"....as a matter of his personal experience.

This, I submit to you, is one of the weaknesses of the Christian church in contemporary society. It has become so much a part of our culture--it has become so much a part of our atmosphere--that a great many people simply ride on the experience of other people, or live off the religious pattern of their ancestors.

Yesterday morning, and I must ( ) to my friend for this---he brought to me a matter of great concern for him and his family....someone whom they loved dearly had, if I may use the expression, defected from the Christian religion and had, with conviction, embraced a non-Christian religion. Now the question that he put to me was this, "How can anyone who has been a Christian prefer anything else to Jesus Christ?"

This must be said, my friends--there are many people who take the name of Jesus Christ who have never had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and it could be that there are any number of people who have their names upon a church roll--who have made a commitment to an organization, but who have never had an encounter with Jesus Christ.

That's why, in no uncertain manner, whenever a new-member class is formed in Saint Luke Church, the first thing that this Pastor tells them, ..."We are interested in talking to you about Jesus Christ....The fact that this should hapoen within the framework of Saint Luke Church is purely incidental....Our primary concern is not that your name should be added to the church roll, but that we might see you as one who has come to do business with Jesus Christ."

Now it could be that in our day and age that a person who had never been brought up within the Christian church, in some instances could have an advantage--because when he's confronted by the Christian church he can ask very boldly, "But what does this mean?"...and then the missionary can

say...."It means commitment to Jesus Christ--and we will welcome you into our fellowship until in and through your experience you have come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour"....and this is what the church is.

But in this day and age for so many people, their first concern is the church as an organization and as an institution, and this could be a weakness. Luke would shout to us, it seems to me, if he were here, ..."What I have been able to pass on and what has become the spade-work of the cultivation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I pass on to you because I have re-discovered this thing for myself.....I can say to you--'the Kingdom of God is near to you'--because I have found out that the Kingdom of God is already in my heart, and this I know by way of experience.

The story of John Wesley is profitable reading for any disciple of our Lord. John Wesley had been brought up within the framework of the Christian church. A noble ambition had laid hold upon him and he decided to become a missionary--an evangelist--so much so that he turned his back upon his native England and he came to these shores, here in North America. He wanted to be a missionary to the Indians.

And after some time in the south-land, down in Georgia, he became disappointed and frustrated and returned to his beloved country. On his way back, caught in a storm, fearful for his life, he discovered that the only calm group aboard ship--a handful of Moravians, simple-minded, dedicated people. They said to John Wesley in words that could be classified in this manner..."If you know Jesus Christ, you don't have to be afraid! Do you know Jesus Christ? Do you know Him?"....That set John Wesley thinking...."Do I know Him? I? Myself?"

Some time later, on May 25, 1738, in Aldersgate Street Mission in

London, John Wesley wandered into a service and there the man in charge was talking to people about salvation and Christ as personal Saviour; and he was dealing with Luther's Commentary on the Romans; and John Wesley records for us---he was fortunate enough to be able to name the exact moment--he said..."It was at a quarter to nine, on this May 25, that I found my heart strangely warmed....my heart....That's one way of saying that it dawned on me that all that I had been telling other people and all that they had been telling me is now true for me personally--Jesus Christ is mine!"

In the tradition of Saint Luke, this church can well afford to think of the events and pick up that lesson as Lesson #1: Every man must find himself in the place where he re-discovers for himself the meaning of the Christian Gospel.

The second lesson that comes from us--we who would carry on the tradition of Saint Luke, is that when he saw fit to pass this thing on to other people, he decided to pass it on in the best possible way. You'll be interested in knowing that his Greek--those first four verses of the Gospel according to Luke--are the finest Greek to be found anywhere in the Bible....as much as to say, "If I am to pass on this wonderful story of God's love and His grace, then I must use the best possible means by which to pass it on....Only the best can serve my Master." And when we study the life of Saint Luke and the Gospel that bears his name, you will also note that as you read the Gospel according to Luke, you discover very definitely that he wants Jesus Christ to be taken to the whold wide world and that <u>every man</u> should be given the chance to hear about Jesus, <u>everywhere.</u>

Now, for those of us who have been unusually responsive to these days when we've been talking about the "Forward With The Future" in Saint Luke Church, you ought to be able to write for yourself the con-

cluding paragraph of this sermon. We who take the name of Saint Luke--we who belong to his tradition--find ourselves in the position where, in this, our day, we shall endeavor to re-discover the meaning of the Christian Gospel. We ought not, after two decades, simply to go on believing in Jesus Christ on the basis of those who for two decades have kept this church alive; but, under God, the "Forward With The Future" emphasis comes as an opportunity for us to re-examine and to re-discover the meaning of the tradition according to Luke.

After twenty years--here are five years now, close at hand--can we, in the spirit of Saint Luke, deal with them as Saint Luke would warn? Wouldn't he say to us...."You're old enough now"....and sit down and say to yourself...."Why did they form Saint Luke Church back in 1940, anyway?..Why should there be such a thing as this congregation?...And why should people over two decades keep it a going concern?"

Now for those of you who benefit from these two decades--can you re-discover for yourself the justification for the existence of this church? And once you've discovered for yourself, Saint Luke might say to us, and rightfully so..."Can you pass it on to others in the best possible way?....Will you see fit to pass on this Gospel that you've had for twenty years....to the greatest number of people?" .....

And there you spell out, in some way, some of the objectives of these next five years....to enable young people, in particular, in this parish to discover for themselves the full meaning of the Christian religion, that in every relationship that they have with this church, they should grow as Christians....and that this church should not exist as a place for baby-sitting for teen-agers; that this church should not be an organization where we simply occupy the time of 300 young people between the ages of twelve and eighteen; that this church should be a place where we perhaps may be able more effectively to enable every single

young person to know the glorious discovery of Jesus Christ as personal Saviour; and also that once we discover these things for ourselves, that these things should not exist to the glory of this congregation--that they exist to the glory of God, by going beyond these doors--keeping ourselves through Dr. Reber in Liberia---keeping ourselves in the name of Jesus Christ as a positive witness to boys and girls in our institutions....who, at the time of their incarceration, may be more susceptible to the Gospel than at any other time in their life---to go into places where there is no organized set-up by which the name of Jesus Christ may be given.....

If Saint Luke were here, I think his soul would be thrilling and throbbing for the fact that here is a segment in time, in the life of this congregation, when we're asked to re-discover for ourselves the meaning of the Kingdom of God.

..... "If a handful of men, following Christ, could turn the world upside down" how tremendous would be the witness and influence of this congregation if the enormity of this venture into faith were to truly lay hold upon the souls of each of us" ..... Thoughts on the sermon!

THPOUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

On this Reformation Sunday, the sermon is entitled, "Through Faith in Jesus Christ," and the test is from the Epistle for the day, the 22nd verse of the 3rd chapter of the Epistle to the Romans:

> "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe:"

I tell you, you do not do him justice....for on this day when you think of Martin Luther, invariably there comes to your mind the picture of the monk of Wittenburg, standing at the door of the castle church and posting there a sheet of paper listing 95 things that he would be more than happy to discuss with anyone....here are some things that vex and disturb his soul--some things, so it seems to him, that should be corrected and reformed in the church that he loved. I tell you, you do not do him justice if this is the only picture that you have of Martin Luther today.

Nor do you do him justice if you think also of another picture and perhaps think only of these two....stubborn, defiant German that he was, standing at the imperially decreed gathering of people in the great city of Worms--and as he stands there, the whole world seems to wait....Will he take back what he has said?....Will he bow before his enemies?...And there again, with equal defiance..."Here I stand....Otherwise I cannot do....So help me God." I tell you, you do not do him justice if this is the only picture that you might have in your mind today when you think of Martin Luther.

Nor do you do him justice if you have a series of pictures in front of you and you may include the picture of Martin Luther with pen in hand, translating from the other languages into the native tongue of his beloved Germans the Scriptures--so that anyone and everyone could read---

could read for himself, in his own tongue, the glorious news of God's Gospel. I still say, you do not do him justice if this should be the only series of pictures that come to your mind when you think of Martin Luther.

Nor will you do him complete justice if, now, you think of him writing hymns, such as we have just sung, by which he would have everyone who claims the name of Christ to proclaim this praise with his lips on the wings of a song.

You will never do Martin Luther justice until you see him in another role--not standing with defiance before kings and emperors and the lords of the church--not taking a piece of paper and defying the pope and burning it in a public square--not sitting with a pen in hand--....you will never do Martin Luther justice, and the cause that claims his mind and spirit and soul, until you see him upon his knees!

You can never appreciate the full meaning of the Protestant tradition until you see Martin Luther--not as the stubborn, defiant one, but over against that, as the struggler, the seeker, the longing for something on the face of God--and until he found it, he would not be satisfied.

That's the Martin Luther that I am constrained to ask you to view very carefully today....Martin Luther, if you please, the penitent....Martin Luther, if you will, the struggler with his soul....Martin Luther, by all means, a man who wanted to see the face of God in clear and perfect focus and would not be satisfied until he did. He is the seeker, the struggler.

He came to his superior...."How can I know that God loves me?....How can I believe that Jesus Christ saves me?"....

"Read the Scriptures, Martin Luther....Read the church fathers, Martin Luther....Read the philosophers of other days....Read them, Martin

Luther!"

And so Martin Luther read. And as Martin Luther read, he got a picture of a God that he could not love. He got a picture of God that was just....he got a picture of God who in His majesty sat in heaven above....he got a picture of God who was pure spirit--was far removed.

Nothing that he read could give him the satisfaction that this God of justice was also a God of mercy--this God of justice was also a God of love.....

"Read, Martin Luther"....but the more Martin Luther read, the more he became confounded and puzzled and disturbed. He could not be sure. No book in itself--and listen carefully--not even the reading of the Scriptures, as the reading of the Scriptures, could give him the satisfaction for which he sought.

"Do good works, Martin Luther--the more you do, the more God will make note of it and that will be pleasing in God's sight....."...Martin Luther was thrilled when he made the pilgrimage to Rome. It was in winter-time--cold--miserable....but there was sunshine in his soul, so he thought, because he was making a pilgrimage. And when the pilgrimage would be over, so he believed at the moment, there would come to him the basking in the sunshine of God's love.

Martin Luther made the pilgrimage; and he counted it a great privilege to make certain prayers and to read mass in one great church after another....but none of these things in themselves brought him satisfaction.

Even at the end of the day, when he could say...."Look, God--these are the prayers that I've prayed today"....."Look, God,--this is the pilgrimage that I made"...."Look, God--this is the day of begging that I did in Your behalf!".....even in the historic church of St. John the Lateran, said to be the very stairs upon which our Saviour walked and

climbed before the judgement hall of Pilate....even as he made his prayers there he could not get the satisfaction that God loved him.... and he had the feeling that he could never, never please God....that he could never be certain that he would be numbered in the ranks of the redeemed.

"Martin Luther," said the church---read!"

"Martin Luther," said the church---"do good works!"

"Martin Luther," said the church---"pray!"

And Martin Luther prayed. We have it as a matter of record that he spent six hours in disciplined prayer....those of us who can hardly keep our mind on God for three minutes....six hours!....this searcher, this struggler---contemplating God. God's face did not become as real to him as he thought that it should. This is difficult to accept.

"Martin Luther, pray to the saints! They are better than you. They have an advantage with God....pray to them!"

He chose for himself 21 saints. He took three each day and then he prayed through them...."Dear God, if you can't hear my prayer, hear the prayer of St. Anthony--hear the prayer of St. Joseph--they're praying for me....let them bring the burden of my soul to you...."

You'll misunderstand me, my friend, if, after the preaching of this sermon, I should allow you to think that reading of the Scriptures, the doing of good works and prayers in themselves cannot be efficacious in the sight of God---they can; but in themselves they might not be able to give what a man needs ~~know~~ most when he stands before God. And this is what Martin Luther wanted most....to have complete, unmitigated, unadulterated assurance that God loves him, and to know that when he should breathe his last he would be numbered in the ranks of the redeemed.

He would go to the church fathers and they would say...."But Martin, you do not know....we only know that we ought to please God"....and Martin would say...."But how can I please a God that I'm not sure loves me?....how can I have this assurance?"

And not a single one could completely satisfy him---dear Father Staufitz tried the best he could, and he had as gracious an influence as any superior that Martin Luther ever knew....but still there was the struggle of his soul...."How can I know?....How can I have the assurance that I am a child of God?....that God loves me?...."

No man has ever really begun to live until he has reckoned with this problem. No man has ever thought fully and completely about God until there has been vouch-safed to him the blessed assurance that he is God's child--and that there is no doubt about it whatsoever.

I tell you this morning--you do not do Martin Luther justice until you see him in the role of the penitent and the struggler--the seeker after God--the man who will not be satisfied until he has perfect assurance that God loves him--that Jesus Christ is his redeemer--and that he is being saved!

Because the church believes this so intensely, she has written it magnificently into her liturgy, and ever so often, when you come to church you hear the officiating minister grant you absolution in God's name and the wonderful benediction...."he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

Should you come to this church on a Sunday morning and should you find the sermon cold, impersonal, unedifying....should you come to this church some Sunday and perhaps not find the anthem or the music thrilling or to your liking....the Lutheran Church insists that no man should ever come crossing her threshold, on the day when the worship experience such as this is taking place, without being assured--again and again and

again....you are a child of God!...God does love you!...God sent Jesus Christ into the world to redeem you!

And if you were to take the sermon out of this worship service.... if you were to take the music out of this worship service....you would still have a complete worship service in itself--once you have done anything that could bring you to the declaration of the words...."he that believes and is baptized shall be saved."

This is the cardinal principle of the Protestant Reformation--that every man should know that by faith in Jesus Christ....not by the prayers that a man may make, pleasing as prayer may be to God....not by the good deeds that he may do, as favorably as God may look upon the good works of any man....not even in the reading of the Scriptures, necessary as Scripture reading may be--but a man is saved by accepting the fact that Jesus Christ is his Lord and Saviour and that there is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved.

That was the struggle of Martin Luther....and you'll have to get him in perfect focus now--you've got to see him as the struggler--and then one glorious day, as he continues to ponder the Scriptures, it dawned on him--"-sola fide!--only by faith can I believe all these things!--only by faith can I know that I am a child of God!"

Now let me give you a free translation of that word--faith. Faith is responding to what I say I believe--faith is living by what I say I believe.

Martin Luther then, by faith, as the insight came to him from Romans, in particular, began to live as a child of God and began to accept what God was always offering him.

I do not know at what level you are in your religious experience. I do not know how clearly you have brought God into focus--I don't know. For some , He may still be a God high and lifted up, who's going to wait

until the last day to announce the condition and the estate of your soul....He could be a God who is pure spirit--who is only to be thought about and not to be adored.-----I would covet for every one of us the glorious experience of Martin Luther, who accepts by faith the fact of God's love, because of his experience in Jesus Christ....."I know God loves me because of what I have seen in Jesus Christ!....I know God will save me because I know what God has done for me through Jesus Christ!.... ..I know I will be saved because day by day I shall try to live as God's child and do the things that please Him---these things I will do, not because I want His merit--these things I cannot help but do because I know He loves me...."

.... Here do we do the preacher of this sermon justice until we see him with his soul laid bare in his earnest struggle to make real the Kingdom of God to all who are pleased in this case .... Thoughts on the Sermon

All Saints' Day November 1, 1959

THREE MARKS OF A SAINT

The sermon on this All Saints' Day is entitled, "Three Marks of a Saint." The text is from the Epistle for the day. It is the 9th verse of the 7th chapter of the Book of Revelations:

> "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;"

Now there's a picture of heaven for you that each of us can well afford to take to heart, and as we do so, do it with rejoicing. For note, if you will, this seer, this man who got a glimpse into heaven above, finds it to be a place that is crowded--more people there than any man could number. A happy thought indeed, when sometimes we're constrained to think that the world is going to any place except heaven. Here was one holy man who, when he took a picture of heaven and brought it into clear and proper focus--a multitude so great that no man could count!

Note also this man's glimpse into heaven--that it's a place of great rejoicing. The battle is over. They have passed now from the Church Militant into the Church Triumphant--and God Himself is wiping away all tears from their eyes.

There's a third thing to be said about this place--in heaven above--crowded....joyous....--everyone who got there, got there the same way--by way of the Cross, if you please--these are they that have come through great tribulation. God Himself, through Christ, has washed them white by the Blood of the Lamb. Here's a picture of heaven that we do well to remember.

Now when we think of heaven, it is populated by people who deserve the name 'saint.' Now let me tell you at once--as we use the word saint

this morning, it will not be according to the terminology and the vocabulary of the Roman Catholic Church. For the Romanist, a saint is one who, first of all, has lived an exemplary life which is unusually rare--exceedingly virtuous--his kind seldom found, seldom seen.

In the second place, to deserve the name saint, according to the Roman church, you must be one by whose life or through association with your life, miracles have been validated.

And in the third place, you can't possibly be a saint, according to the Roman church, unless you're worthy of cannonization, and that is the church itself must make all kinds of investigation; and then, after you've been dead a while, the formal pronouncement will be made, and you're a saint--by decree.

We shall not use such terminology or the understanding of the word saint in that respect this morning. We shall use the word saint as it's used in the New Testament--and there is a very interesting word for the saint that's used in the New Testament again and again--it's a Greek word--"hagiov"--which means "one completely dedicated--one who consecrates his will to fulfilling the purposes of God." That's why, ever so frequently, the New Testament can refer to people as saints. That's why the Apostle Paul could say..."and to the saints at such-and-such a place----to the saints who are in your home."

Now they who are in heaven above, having passed from the Church Militant into the Church Triumphant, are called saints. Saints are they because they have given their will to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Ah, they are not perfect people....he who took the name of saint--for whom perhaps, of all people, we might say--"He is the chiefest of the saints"----the Apostle Paul himself....Paul could say, again and again...."I am the chiefest of sinners."

take a measure of pride in thinking that they belong to a church that can have two pastors on its staff....we are a proud people.

We are proud in so many things. I would remind you--the first ear-mark of a saint is humility. That gives hope to some of us--cause for rejoicing--because when we search our souls and compare ourselves with other people, we say...."What is it that I could offer God?...what could I bring to Him--God, who has everything?....could He use me?"

It may be a surprising thing to learn that the saints in heaven above might have been, for some of us down here on earth, the most insignificant of all people....they had no trumpets before them....they simply ordered their lives quietly--with meekness and humility. Let me name one from this congregation right now--a very simple illustration--but I dare you to think of it as anything but exceedingly precious.

Hospitalized for more than a week, and as a patient in the hospital, according to the plan of God, two or three other people shared that very same room--two of them, at least, terminal cases. They came to the member of this parish and said...."Do you find this disturbing?....Would you like us to change you to another room?" Quietly, and with the utmost of meekness and humility, she said...."Why should I?....If my influence, in Jesus' name, could be upon someone who ends her earthly pilgrimage, then in Jesus' name, let me exert that influence."

And God be praised, and God be thanked--that's exactly what happened.....a man, a complete stranger to her, returned to her hospital room after the funeral service of a lady who shared this very same room, and came back to thank her for her gracious influence in Christ upon his mother as she finished her earthly pilgrimage. In complete humility......"what can I offer Jesus Christ?"....sweetness and grace and kindness--even to a soul whose days are numbered--whose hours are numbered. This is the kind of stuff of which saints are made....this is the strength of

The Bible says...."There is none righteous, no not one." They who are in heaven above are not perfect people. The mark of a saint is never perfection. The mark of a saint is consecration--the intention--the desire--positive inclination to do what is right in God's sight....they are the ones who, by the Grace of God, pass through the great gates into heaven above.

Now if we were to walk from person to person in heaven above, in all liklihood we would discover that every single person in heaven has three things in common with every other person. I submit them to you now.....

One is the mark of humility. You can't possible picture a saint, can you, as a proud person? Can you picture anyone in heaven above strutting around as though he had gotten there completely on his own merit?----sticking his thumbs within his vest and saying...."Look what a fine man am I!....Here I have arrived---pay me attention, God....I've come!"

You can't possibly picture a saint as being a proud man. You begin at this point....the ear-mark of any saint is humility, for no man who has ever seen the face of God in Jesus Christ can go his way a proud person....he is made humble. Any man who has ever been exposed to the Grace of Jesus Christ is forced to his knees....even as the great fisherman could say--"Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man," once he had rightly beheld the face of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we are a proud people--we delight in saying what we have done. I get so sick and tired sometimes, of going to Synod or seeing people that I haven't seen for a long time, and hear them ask me the question.....and how many members do you have in your church now?"....as though they wanted to give me cause for boasting, and as though they would enjoy a bit of pride in knowing someone who had--who is Pastor of a church as large as ours...."Do you have an assistant?"....There are people who

this parish....they who walk with meekness and humility...."Lord, such as I am, use me."

The second ear-mark of a saint, the one thing that all of these people in heaven have in common, is that each of them is a life of prayer. You can't think of a person in heaven being at home in heaven unless somewhere along the line, down here on earth, he has had communion with God. There is no such thing as a person in heaven being a stranger to God. Heaven is the place--the great assembly-ground--for the friends of Jesus--people who have gotten to know Him down here. You get to know Him through prayer. The crowning glory of prayer is not asking---it's communion---just basking in the sunlight of God's love---just being made aware that He exists.

Some day I'd like to write the life of a man who grew up some fifty miles from my home town. He can, I think, be rightfully acclaimed as one of the most outstanding men of this generation. His name is Frank Laubach---who has done more than any other single person to teach the silent billions to read or to write. His method of literacy has been acclaimed by countless numbers of governments---and he has done it to the Glory of God. And as these people who could not read or write begin to read and write, somewhere God always becomes a part of the message. Think if this great force were in the hands of an anti-God person!

The amazing thing about Frank Laubach is that he went to the Philippines, and while he was in the Philippines he discovered that he had to do business with a tribe of people that he hated. And yet he called himself a believer in Jesus Christ. How could a man who believes in Jesus Christ hate anyone? I wish that I had his diary in front of me, so that I could read for you his very words....He made up his mind that God would have to take this hate out of his heart, and so he asked God to take possession of his soul....he asked God to make him aware of His

Presence constantly, so that when he was tempted to hate a man, he could not hate him....he asked God to make him prayerfully conscious every moment of the Being of God....he asked God to, even when he sat at a typewriter, that God would control his fingers. Mystical, you say....Ah, but listen to this....he was a man who, as he rides along in a bus or a railroad coach or an airplane, may sit alongside someone who is a complete stranger to him, and yet he will say...."God, through me, speak to this man.....God, through me, speak to this man"....that's praying!....an attitude, an inclination, on the part of one man, to be God-possessed at all times. The saints say...."It can be done!"...and the saints are people like unto us, only they have made up their mind that they want it to happen.

The third ear-mark of a saint is sacrifice. You can't picture anyone going to heaven, clutching something in his hand and keeping it there. You can't picture a saint with a closed fist. You can't picture a saint entering the gate of heaven, dragging behind him things that he refers to as "mine." Saints in heaven above are people who have been willing to give up--to share--and to do it deliberately, as an act of worship. Saints are they who can say..."All that I am and all that I have is yours, God."

I am constrained to tell you that the word sacrifice is a forgotten word in the 20th century Christian's vocabulary. If there's one word that doesn't fit us Christians--if there is any word that doesn't fit us, it's that word sacrifice. Who are we? We are a people of convenience. If it is convenient for me to get to church, I get there....if it is convenient for me to accept a position of responsibility, in Kingdom work, I accept....if it's convenient for me to do this or that thing, I will do it. This is the 20th-century Christian....this is the 20th-century Christian? I shall go to a church, and I may hear the preacher preach, and as

long as his preaching is pleasing to my ears, I shall find it convenient to go. The word sacrifice is alien to our vocabulary. The 20th-century Christian is the best-fed--the best clothed--and the most financially-secure Christian of any generation. The word sacrifice does not belong to our vocabulary.

When Winston Churchill, the great war-time leader of Britain, had his back to the wall and the back of every Britain to the wall, and when the Britishers were confronted by a coal strike and the whole war effort was at stake, they tell me he issued an order that all the miners should be called to the largest hall that London had---as many of them as possible who could come---and some of the representatives of government.... and in the very secretive meeting at that time--he laid before them the bare, cruel, cold facts of Britain's last-ditch stand....and as only Churchill could do it, he said...."One of these days, when the last shot has been fired, England's troops will be coming home, and they'll march down the great square; and you'll see them there--regiments from all parts of the far-flung battle lines....and some of you will shout out to them---'Where were you?...'Where were you?'....and each in turn might reply where he was when the battle was the fiercest....and you'll appreciate the sacrifice that he made. "But suppose one of those men," Churchill said, "should turn to you and say...'and where were you?'.... Could you say, "We were down in the black depth of the mine, with our backs against the wall...and with sweat and toil, we, too, sacrificed!'?....Could you answer like that?"

With my whole heart, I believe God is putting us suburbanite, 20th-century Christians to the test. And one of the tests that He's going to use will be this....not what you have--but how much did you give up?

..... "--self-portrait of the preacher! ... Thoughts on the sermon

Sermon November 8, 1959

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S CHALLENGE

The sermon on this day is entitled, "Our Response To God's Challenge," and the text is from the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to John, portions of the 5th and 6th verses:

> "When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?
> And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do."

The text, of course, is biographical. Each one of us in his own way could write a similar experience, for again and again life seems to confront us with a challenge. Life seems to be saying, asking us, "What will you do about it?" That is precisely what happened on this occasion.

Do you remember the historical setting? Fame, the fame of Jesus, had gone throughout all parts of the world--the then-known world within hearing of Galilee, and people came to hear Jesus Christ preach. They were so enthralled by His preaching that they stayed on, it seemed endlessly, until it occurred to one of them that they ought to be on their way now, and when the crowd began to disperse, it was Jesus Christ who became mindful of a problem--there was no food--and many of them, if they were not fed, would faint by the way before they got home.

It was Jesus Christ who was aware of the problem before any of the disciples had come to him and said, "This is a problem now, that we ought to face"---it was Jesus Christ who called it to their attention, and He turned to Philip and He said, "Philip--what are you going to do about it?" That's one way by which you can interpret that text..."Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?"....here is a problem.....
..."Philip....what will you do about it?"

This God of ours is the God of challenge. Again and again He comes to us, raising the question, "What will you do about it?" This problem had to be met. God knows what He would do. But God has a way, sometimes, of not accounting until we make the first move, and then He will step in, and He may walk by our side, and He may put His hand into ours, and He will not fail us, and as long as we keep to the journey's end, He will sustain us--give us courage and allow us to achieve and to accomplish. But there comes a moment when God will not do a single thing, and the only thing that He may do will be to focus His eye upon us and say, "What, now, will you do?"

I said to you that this sermon is biographical. It happens again and again in the life of a nation....in the life of a community....in the life of an individual....in the life of a church----where God focuses His eye upon a people and to them specifically, He says...."This is a challenge.... ...and I'm focusing my eye upon you and I'm saying to you, 'What will you do about it?'"

This is the day when we can recall very easily and quite readily how this text and how this truth can apply to Saint Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church in Silver Spring. Back in mid-summer, 1939, it had been definitely approved in the minds of some people, as directed by the mind of God, that there should be a Lutheran congregation of the United Lutheran Church in Silver Spring. There was none.

There was a man from God, Milton J. Bieber by name, who came here, and he went from house to house---person to person---inviting people to come to a meeting. Only three people showed up--but before those three people-- ilton Bieber, a man from God--laid before them God's challenge-- there should be a church in this community that would shepherd souls--that would show men the way to Heaven, and if it please God, that church should be a Lutheran church.

Milton Bieber, in God's name, kept telling that to those three men--only three who showed up. Nov those three men could have said...."Why should we give our time and efforts?....why should we concern ourselves?....if only three people come--why should we have to worry about it?"

But God was looking at those three men, just as God looked through Christ upon Philip, and Philip looked upon the rest of the disciples. They were the ones nearest at hand---they couldn't pass it off to somebody else. When God looks you straight in the eye, it behooves everyone of us to remember full well that at that moment He's not looking at anybody else.

So that challenge came to those three men. God said...."There should be a church here....What will you do about it?" The three men, praise God, said..."There will be."....and they gave of their time and their effort to further the interest of Saint Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church--or the congregation that would be called by that name.

They had an organization meeting. Think of this----we've had this morning, twice, choral procession--people walking the sacred aisle, wearing the vestments of the church--numbering more than the total number of people who came forward to get Saint Luke Church organized....so insignificant seemed to be the number. But those 67 people, including the guests, said,...."This looks as though God is asking something that could and should be done!"....and they responded---this was their answer to God's challenge. The church should be organized.....the church was organized.

For about 3, 4, 5 years they meetin borrowed placed--a lodge hall--the Silver Theater---meeting in people's homes....and then God kept putting in front of them this challenge...."You should have a place of your own....You should have a roof over your head....you should have walls that should surround you....you should have even brick and mortar and stained-glass and an altar, which in themselved would become witnesses of

God's grace and God's truth, that even when people would pass the corner of Highland Drive and Colesville Road--that even what they would see there should become a tangible evidence of people's response to God's challenge----and they responded. God was saying to them...."There should be a church built---what will you do about it?"....they built the church. They could have given their time and their energies to so many other things.....
...those war years....but God kept saying...."You should have a church built."

Organized in 1940--in 1945 they laid the cornerstone for this church----only 176 members, answering God's challenge and building a house of worship four times their ordinary use. Once they were in this church, God prospered their efforts. And then, I suppose, there were folks who said...
.."Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could say that we've arrived---'God, this is it!"'.....But this God of ours is the Great Challenger. Aside from the name "Redeemer" you ought to remember that He is always challenging us, and it would seem to me, my friend, when a man reaches the point where he is no longer challenged by anything beyond himself, his life has run its course. When a man no longer has anything beyond himself to challenge himself, that man is already dead. God does not let us alone. God is always challenging us to do something, if for no other reason, to keep ourselves alive, and others too.

So God laid before the people of this church this challenge...."Why, you have boys and girls....They're coming in increasing numbers....They, too, should have a fit place in which to meet....They should have more adequate surroundings".....God says,..."I ask you, the people of this parish, to build a Christian Education unit".....six years after they moved in here....and in 1953-54 they had the joy of seeing the Christian Education building erected and dedicated to the glory of God, as an evidence of man's response to God's challenge.

Now that we have our walls built ...now that we have our Christian Education unit, we've been answering, on our own, God's challenge--and we've been adding one service after another....last Sunday we had four morning services....and then we've revised our evening hours so that we can minister to 200 young people on a Sunday night....and we have two sessions of Sunday School, to use more adequately and efficiently the structure that we built for the Christian Education program.

God goes on challenging us in one way after another. And I suppose there would be some of us who would say...."Wouldn't it be wonderful if this would be it?....no more areas to conquer for Jesus Christ...we have arrived!".....But God sees some things that we do not see, and now that we've reached our majority--almost 20 years, come and gone--beginning our 21st year in a few months--God is saying to us in Saint Luke Church something else. God is saying...."You have areas of great need that must be met, and I'm going to show them to you....I'm going to ask you to think about them....I'm going to ask you--<u>YOU</u>--to do something about them.

Make no mistake about it, this is not the echo of any single human voice--it is God who says to us...."300 young people between the ages of 12 and 18--alert--precious....what are you doing for them in a very special way?....what are you doing for them in a more than ordinary way?".... Think of it....if for five or six years in the history of this congregation we were perfectly willing, as a congregation, to have one man shepherd less than 300 souls, confirmed members, twelve and on up--if we found it important to have one Pastor for less than 300 people....is it not also important to have one man who becomes the conscience of this parish for 300 teen-agers, whose souls are plastic and equally precious in the sight of God----to minister to them specifically....to plan their programs...to recruit their leaders....and to see that they are, in a most certain way, claimed for Jesus Christ?

I could not speak to you as I speak to you now, if I could not remember something that I can't forget....In 1947, I was in Prague, and while I was there, I happened to attend some of the sessions of the First World Federation of Democratic Youth--a Communist-inspired gathering of young people--in Prague--by Communist direction. I saw them....I heard them....clever men that they were----they had their greatest and most impressive parade of those young people on the streets of Prague--on a Sunday morning!.....this so great defiance against the church of Jesus Christ!

I heard them the night before, a small group of them--12,000 out of the 35,000.....I heard them chant....I heard them sing....I saw them dance.. ....I heard them....I saw them perform....and I tell you, ashamedly, I have never heard Christian young people ascribe such praise to Jesus Christ as I heard that band of teen-agers, in staccato-like fashion, proclaim two earthly leaders of the Soviet sphere....."Stalin-and-Tito"...."Stalin-and-Tito"...."Stalin-and-Tito".....and it went on almost endlessly--so had they been captured and captivated! And this very hour, the Comunist sphere in the world is reaping the rich dividend that they invested in those young people at that time.

And God is saying to us in Saint Luke Church...."This is an area of great need--I bring it to your attention....What will you do about it?"

And God is saying to us in Saint Luke Church at this particular time in our history...."You have your building....you have your altar....you have your program....you have the greater part of your staff....you have your Christian Education emphasis....you have your ministry to people of all ages--but do you know that within six miles of your very church there are those who have yet to be told, in a very specific way, about Jesus Christ!....within six miles of Saint Luke Church, or even a little greater distance than that, the Council of Churches in the National Capital Area

tells about institutions where there are people waiting to be told about the saving grace of Jesus Christ--teen-agers who never so much as darken the door of a church--who in a brief period of incarceration are most vulnerable to the Gospel, and there is no chaplain to take it to them!...."

God brings this to our attention. He's saying to Saint Luke Church--He's focusing His eye upon us....."What will you do about it?"...old people, facing the sunset years of life, who need a minister, through the Council of Churches, to the National Lutheran Home for the Aged...."I bring this to your attention,"...says God..."It's an area of need!....What will Saint Luke do about it?"

The Lutheran Inner Mission Society tells us that in their program, their greatest area of need right now is to have someone who could guide and direct a program so essential to mothers--to women who have been deserted, divorced or widowed--and they have children--and they say, Lutheran as they are...."Isn't there some Lutheran home that can help us?....isn't there some Lutheran women that stands ready to be as a parent to my child until I can get readjusted?"....Right now, this is the greatest single area of need going unmet in the Lutheran Inner Mission Society....It has been brought to our attention--we know about it. God says....to Saint Luke Church...."What will you do about it?"

And then I think God sees our past....God sees our present....God sees down through the years....God's looking ahead--one decade after another for Saint Luke Church....He sees some things that some of us can't possibly see in the future....I believe earnestly that God has great things in store for this congregation, in the years that lie ahead---else we have no right to exist right now!.....And as God knows those things, God is saying...."Why take 18 or 20 years to discharge your debt, if in 5 years you can do it?"....This is the voice of God to us--that other areas of need should be met.

It isn't very often that I find myself in the position of being able to write a personal letter to almost every home in this parish, but that's just about the thing that I attempted to do last week. Now some of you may remember that brief paragraph that came in that letter--as personal as possible--and I sent it to you because with all my heart I believe that God is putting us to a test in Saint Luke Church....God is saying to us right now...."These are areas of need--what will you do about it?" He is not asking any other congregation right now--at this particular moment--He's asking us. God knows what He would do.

Now those disciples, when they were confronted with a challenge--five thousand people to be fed--looked round about among themselves and they gave God an answer from what they had....and I think God is waiting for us to do that right now--to look round about within our own families--within our own homes--within our own resources--to answer.

Now who are we, confronted by this challenge? Let me read for you several significant statements to come from a most thought-provoking paper--more so of its kind than anything I've seen in recent years....Henry Smith Leiper has done a very interesting thing--he has taken the total world population and condensed it into a single town of a thousand people. Now if we were to be in that town of a thousand people, comprising all of the people on the face of the earth, of all of those people in the one thousand, only 60 of them would be people from the United States of America--60 out of one thousand. The rest of the world would be represented by 940 people.

Now, mark you this!...of the 60 Americans--60 out of one thousand--60 against 940--those 60 Americans would be receiving half of the total income! The American people receive half of the total income of all the peoples on the face of the earth--60 Americans against 940--60 getting half-

--the other half being shared with 940 people!

In the town as a whole, of one thousand people, about 330--only about one-third--would be classified as Christians....670 would be non-Christian---and at least 80 people in the town out of one thousand, indicating the total population of the world, at least 80 would be believing Communists, and 370 would be people living under Communist domination.

Here is something to startle you--the 60 Americans--the 60 out of the one thousand--would have an average life expectancy of 70 years....all the others of the 940 would be lucky if they could average 40 years!

The 60 Americans would have fifteen times as many possessions, per person, as all the rest of the people....60 would have fifteen times as many possessions as 940!

Of this total population, more than half would be unable to read or to write, and half of these people would never have heard of Jesus Christ---how He lived--how He died and <u>why</u> He died....while on the other hand, more than half would have heard and would have been taught to some degree about Karl Marx, Nicolai Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Nekita Khrushchev.

God is challenging us. God knows we can answer Him. God is waiting---waiting to see what we will do. God is waiting for our move, and once we make it, without hesitation He will join our ranks. He will slip His hand into ours--He will walk by our side and He will give us the joy that belongs to those who know Him and who share Him.

I think the happiest people on the face of the earth at the time of the feeding of the five thousand must have been every one of them--those who had and who shared, and those who did not have and who received. They knew the joy of being cared for. Beloved, I know of no greater compliment than what God is giving us right now. When God challenges any man, He pays him a compliment!

Sermon November 15, 1959

"THE BREVITY AND THE MISERY OF LIFE"

The sermons this year, for the most part, in Saint Luke Church, are being based upon the Old Testament lessons for the day. The sermon this morning is entitled, "The Brevity and the Misery of Life." The text is the first verse of the 14th chapter of the book of Job:

> "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble."

Our young people, not too long ago, reproduced in Bieber Hall the interesting fantasy, "Space Isn't Far Enough." One of the significant lines in the play - "they start growing when they start wondering" - is as true for adults as it is for youth. At least, that was most certainly true for the writer of the book of Job.

Job, whatever else you may have to say about him, no matter how little of how much you know about him, is a man who began to think deeply. He did not live superficially. When life struck him a most cruel blow, if he never had done any thinking at all before, he most certainly began to think then---as to the meaning of life itself---as to the fact of God's existence and his relationship to God.

Job thought very deeply. That's where some of us begin to part company with Job, for, generally speaking, we are not a people accustomed to thinking--to thinking deeply, if we think at all.

A wise leader of the United Lutheran Church in America once said.... .."You can afford to take time to think--you have really very little competition." Why is it that we don't think? Why is it that we fail to take life seriously? Thomas Carlyle once said himself, so eloquently...."To live has always been a serious thing, but how few they are who take life seriously--who think deeply....about life itself."

My friend, we don't think deeply because we think there's no need for our thinking, because so much of our thinking is done for us. All of this mass media of communication - Press - Radio - Television - it's geared, dedicated to only one purpose---to do our thinking for us. They have all the answers. They give us answers to even questions that we never think of raising. Maybe that's why we don't think--because our thinking is done, in a good many areas, for us.

Maybe we don't think deeply because it isn't that we don't feel we have to think, but...we're afraid to think deeply!.....To think deeply about life?....That means I may have to see it in its sordid and cruel aspects, and many of us would much rather deal with rainbows and all that glitters.

To think deeply about life? If you'll remember it when you leave this nave this morning, you could take with you from the literature table what is, for me, one of the most thought-provoking things I've read in many a time--a picture of our world in miniature. And it isn't a very pleasant prospect....and it could be that a good many of us might read it very casually--superficially--and hesitate to think deeply about all that it implies....because it isn't pleasant. Maybe that's why we don't like to think deeply---because when a man begins to think deeply, he probes, and he gets underneath the surface of some things, and what he discovers is not pleasant. But a man never really lives until he thinks....and thinks deeply.

And we say...."No. I won't think because I might come out at the same place that Job came out, and Job was a good man and when Job began to think------listen, Preacher, what you just said!----'Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble...He comes forth like a flower

and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow and does not continue'---Job---found life not only short, but miserable as well."

I ask you my friend, have you ever taken life seriously....have you ever found yourself in a position of where you thought only of the stark reality of life itself, and you pitted yourself against life and life itself? I had an experience like that. Once alone in the Castle of (Sheone) I sat there by the window's edge, and I heard the ebbing of the water underneath....slopping back and forth....and I felt myself being tossed feverishly upon the endless waves of Life, and I began to say...."and what does it mean?....what does it mean to me?....does it make any sense at all?..."

And it warmed my heart to discover these words of a truly dedicated man--very few like him--Studdert Kennedy, the dynamic preacher of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square, in London----let me read his words, eloquently put...."I was alone at night on a moor by the sea. Above me a dark velvet dome and a million stars. Beneath me moving slowly in a heavy swell, the sea. No sound but the rustling of a breeze through the heather, and the boom of the waves against the cliff. I was alone, that is, I was acutely, painfully conscious of myself as a reality, and at the same time even more acutely conscious of that vast, shadowy, mysterious other-than-myself, looming up out of the darkness over against me - the universe------ Suppose I cried out to the great other-than-myself: "Who goes there?" would there be an answer? Or would there be nothing but the whisper of the wind in the heather, the boom of the swell on the cliffs, and the desolate cry of that lonely gull returning late to its nest?...."

I tell you, my friend, upon the answer to this question lies the stuff out of which we fashion our character. Tell me the answer that a man gets to a question such as this and I'll tell you the man that he becomes. Tell me what you think about life itself, and I'll tell you what you are. Job,

miserable soul that he was,..."Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble"....Life is short....Life is miserable.

Do you remember the words of Omar Khayyam.....

"Into this Universe, and why not knowing,
Nor whence, like water willy-nilly flowing;
And out of it, as wind along the waste,
I know not whither, willy-nilly blowing....."

Studdert Kennedy got an answer to his question. He said...."It's God! God's in the universe....God's behind it!....all of this thing seems up to God".....and as far as mylife is concerned, be it long or short, it's accountable to God....and no matter what happens to me, God's waiting to see what I do with it. Pleasant or ugly, behind it all, is God!

I must remind you, must I not, that Job lived in the Old Testament. Job is not of the Christian tradition, and that's why, painfully and mournfully, he says...."Life is short and life is miserable." But one day, centuries later, there came to this earth God's Great Galillean--born of the Virgin Mary....He had a short life--33 years was the sum of it--and his life was miserable and far from pleasant, and the longer He lived, the more He dealt with the ugly fact of sin.

33 years--Ah!, let me give you this picture of life....Someone has said that life at 20 is the golden morning;....life at 30 is high noon;.... life at 35 finds us entering the afternoon and life at 60 or 70 finds us well into the sunset. But here was a Man who had barely reached high noon---life for Him was short, painfully short, because it was so miserable. But did He cry out against the brevity of life?....Did He cry out against the misery of life?

Poor Job!....you do not have the advantage that we have. We may begin to think deeply--we may begin to think as deeply as you, and we, too, may be inclined to say...."Life is short and life is miserable"...but stand-

ing always in the shadow is that magnificent figure of Jesus Christ..."I, too, found life short, and I, too, found it miserable, but I went beyond the brevity of life and I went beyond the misery of life, and I fashioned out of it something to the Glory of God!"

Who am I to take Job to task? But, Job, I say to you--you are right! ...life is brief and life is miserable....but the crowning glory of life does not lie in its length or its shortness. The crowning glory of life lies in the fact that it is a moment in eternity that can be used...and that's why God gives it to us.

I do not know how it rests with you, but it's a great moment in the liturgy of the church, and especially in a new paragraph that we have in the Service Book and Hymnal that we use now--we didn't use it this morning--but on occasion we've used it--the Absolution that comes after we've confessed our sins....."The Almighty and merciful God grant unto you, being penitent, pardon and remission of all your sins, time for amendment of life, and the grace and comfort of his Holy Spirit."....time, no matter how long, how short, is God's gift to us....time, no matter how miserable or pleasant, is God's opportunity....and my authority for it is Jesus Christ!

W. Cosby Bell records the legend of Jubal: how in the days before death came, life seemed to be shallowing out. It had neither 'gravity nor greatness.' But then one day death invaded the family....the person who was there yesterday was not there today. So quickly it was all ended, and then life took on a new dimension. Life I have now....life's to be taken away....but as long as I have it, what must I do with it?

It's a precious thing I tell you, when the youngster wandering into the public park park came upon a man upon a park bench, and trying to make conversation, in childish fashion, the youngster said...."Mister,

what are you for?" Life, I say to you, is always asking us that question... ..What are you for....As long as you have life, what do you do with it?

And they tell me that one day, as Mahatma Gandhi, India's precious saint, took, as was his custom, his half-hour out of every day to spin, and while he was spinning he would meditate and think; and there came into his presence a liquor-seller. Now to sell liquor in India in the days of Mahatma Gandhi was not only against the religion of the Hindus--it was also illegal--it was against the law.

Guilt-stricken as he was, he made conversation. He gave any number of reasons why he was selling liquor and dissipating his life in that particular fashion, and Mahatma Gandhi went on spinning all the time he was talking and gave him little attention--oh, a furtive glance every now and then, but the man went on talking as feverishly as ever, and then it occurred to him that he was protesting too much, and he tried to sum it all up in one sentence and he said...."But a man must live!'....and Mahatma Gandhi simply said..."Must he?....Why?"

Why did a man go on living? Why did he go on day after day? Until you answer that question, I would be inclined to think that none of us had a single right to use another moment, because even time, in the economy of God, is a precious thing. It is brief. To what end do you use it? This is always the question.

A social worker in the slums of New York came upon a strange child who kept standing by the corner of a building; and holding in her hand a broken piece of glass....and the social worker said..."Tell me, my friend--what are you doing?"...and the youngster replied..."I have a sick sister up there--way up there, lady, way up there in that room---can you see it?----she can't see the light of day--that is, she never sees the sunlight--and I found this broken piece of glass and I'm shooting the rays of the sun up

into her room." A fragment of a youngster--in only a moment of life--but in a moment fresh enough to shoot the sun into the life of some single soul.

Job, you were right. Life is brief and life is miserable. But Jesus Christ says it is opportunity--it's a moment in time that you can use to the Glory of God. It does not behoove any of us to sit in judgment on any single soul. I run far more of a risk of it than you do, and the moment for me is never more perilous than when I stand by a grave, and in the name of the church I conduct the service....and there's always the temptation to ask the question...."This life--here in a segment of time, having run its course--could it be said that this life, now finished, has been lived to the Glory of God?....no matter its length nor its brevity....its misery or its good estate"....I go on allowing myself to think that way because with my whole heart I believe that some day that's going to be an acid test that Jesus Christ will put to my life and to yours.

John Oxenham rings a bell in the heart of many of us. He referred to life as a Pilgrim Way:

> But once I pass this way,
> And then - and then, the Silent Door
> Swings on its hinges -
> Opens - closes -
> And no more
> I pass this way.
>
> So while I may
> With all my might,
> I will assay
> Sweet comfort and delight
> To all I meet upon the Pilgrim Way
> For no man travels twice
> The Great Highway
> That climbs through ~~darned~~ darkness up to light
> Through night to day.

And if we probe too deeply, we find so much that is irrevocable in our lives - and we must throw ourselves on God's mercy to show us how to make the most of it — "Thoughts on the Human"

Sermon November 22, 1959

THE GOD WHO COMES, SAVES

The sermon entitled, "The God Who Comes, Saves," is based upon the Old Testament lesson for the day. The text is a portion of the 4th verse of the 35th chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah:

"Your God will come and save you."

I think I know fairly well what this text must have meant to them. I am not nearly as certain of what this text could and should mean to you.

This is what it meant to them. They had lived for many decades in captivity--Jews in exile in Babylon--they had known one restraining influence after another, but they kept reminding themselves that they were God's people. They were the chosen ones, and that, of all the people on the face of the earth, God had a destiny in mind for them. While there were those who defected and went to other religions and turned their back upon the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, there were always the faithful who kept saying...."God will not forget us....God will come again, and when He comes, He will redeem us and He will restore us...He will take us all the way back to the land that we love...."We cannot sing His praise in a strange land--and because He has made us to sing His praise, He'll take us back....He'll guide us on the way. ..He will allow us to enter again into the holy city of Jerusalem....He will re-build for us our temple, and what is more, He will punish our persecutors and oppressors..."

This is what that text meant to them...."God will loom upon our horizon again and when He comes, you may be very certain about it, He will stretch forth His long and good hand and He will stretch it forth to save us--He will be our deliverer.." That's what that text meant to them.

I'm not so sure that it should mean the same thing in the very same way to us. For Isaiah, as he continued to write his great prophetic utterances, switched over to that magnificent thought that one day, for all people, God would come, and when God would come for all people, He would also come in the role of the Redeemer and a restorer; and that one day would come when Jesus Christ would be born in Bethlehem.

It's this event that we're about to celebrate in about four or five weeks. This is the last Sunday in the church year--next Sunday will begin the new chapter in the church year; and the first four weeks are set aside as Advent, meaning a time in which we prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Now we, too, shall say to ourselves..."He is coming....He will come again---and when He comes....." - - can we now say He will come to redeem us?....can we now say He will come to save us from our sins?.... It's a question, you see. And that's why I said to you at the very beginning of this sermon--I'm fairly certain of what this text meant to them, but I'm not at all sure that I know what it means to you, for we are a people who are not given to talking much about sin. We are a people who are not given much to talking about God redeeming us from our guilt--and saving us. We are a proud people....we are a capable people...man is far from being impotent.

Look what we've done--look what we've done in our generation and in the generation preceding us. From where we are right now--think of it!--we are less than 36 hours away, by air, from the farthermost point of the globe. Man can take his wings and he can fly. Man, through wireless and telegraphy, can girdle the earth with his voice in a few moments of time. He can soar into outer space....in your day and mine--think of it!--there is a very great liklihood that he shall plant his feet upon the moon!

With his fingers the skilled surgeon can bring back a dying soul to life again--with a little bit of manipulation--with a little bit of massaging--the heart can be restored....so it has been for some people.

We are, if you may remember a quotation from this desk not too long ago, the best-fed, the best-clad and the most economically-secure group of Christians since the dawn of the Christian church. We have so much... ...and when man has so much, what need has he for God? I know what this text meant to them--they were in bondage and in captivity--they longed for someone to set them free--they were denied so much; but I'm not so sure that I know what this text does and should mean to you and to me.

As an example, here we are. What was in your mind ere you crossed the threshold of this holy place? Did you say to yourself, with fond and fervent anticipation, as you drew nearer and nearer to the altar in this holy place...."I shall go there this morning, and above all else, whatever I may hear or say or have shared with me, there shall come to me the blessed assurance--the declaration of Grace:...."The Almighty God grant unto you, being penitent, pardon and remission of all your sins, time for amendment of life and the Grace and Comfort of the Holy Spirit...."..Was this uppermost in your mind as you looked forward to coming to church today?....that here you could be given the assurance that God forgives you your sin?

Did you say to yourself when you came...."God willing, something may happen in that hour this morning by which I shall have motivation and I shall receive a dynamic by which to know I shall sin less than I sinned yesterday." How much was sin, and the revelation of the fact of sin, in your mind ere you came to this place this morning? And I tell you, with all the earnest candor of my heart, nothing that happens here

on a Sunday morning is as important as the recognition of the truth again and again that God loves us....that God sent Jesus Christ into the world to forgive me my sins, and having been cleansed from my sins, to restore me to the family of man and to walk and live as a redeemed creature.

The people, when they think about sin and talk about salvation, they think about people who go around like this, you see--the tallow-faced, and the fingers tip-to-tip--and the pious sort--who talk about heaven. Heaven? A little boy, in the poet's jingle, said,

"I do not like the Sabbath,
The soap-suds and the starch,
The troops of solemn people
Who to salvation march."

It wasn't at all a pleasant prospect for him. And if a man is inclined to think about salvation and heaven, it's something in the distant future that can wait. And why? Because the present moment, for a good many people, is all too attractive. We who have so much here---what can heaven offer? The wit was perfectly right who took his friend to task when he visited him in his very handsome quarters, amid his magnificant estate...."My, this makes tough competition for heaven!"

There are so many that are so earth-bound that heaven has no meaning whatsoever. Talk about salvation--talk about escape from hell----escape from hell to what? And if a man should think seriously about heaven and salvation, it may be not because he wants the joy of heaven, but because he wants to be saved from the tortures of the damned!

I am not at all sure that you and I can appreciate the meaning of this text. That's precisely why this sermon is being preached--for the simple reason that God will come and God will come into your life...God will stand right at the very door of your heart. He will come to us and when he comes, He will come in the role of the Redeemer.

When Jesus Christ came to earth, that's the only reason why He came....not to be another preacher....not to be another teacher....not to be another prophet....not to be another great leader of men--the world has had those aplenty. Matthew puts it succinctly...."His name shall be called Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." That's why Jesus came into the world--to be the saviour of men from their sins.

Reinhold Niebuhr has taken us all to task when he said...."The matter of salvation from sin isn't incredible to our generation--it's simply irrelevant." For too many people it has no meaning at all. Should that make the coming of Jesus a fact that we ought not to consider? Is it such a hopeless thing that He should have come then, if men cannot relate it to their life and their need and their age? Ah! It makes it all the more necessary. For it is Jesus Christ who stands at the door of our heart, and as He stands there, it is only in His presence that we become aware of the fact of sin in our lives. Peter was perfectly right when, confronted by Jesus Christ, he said what he said, and the only thing that he could say...."Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man!"...and Peter never talked that way until he was confronted by Jesus Christ!

May I remind you this morning, that for the Jew in exile, the word salvation meant 'getting room in which to move about.' That's what salvation meant for Him, and as you read that word again and again in the Arabic, you get that same connotation....'freedom in which to move'. To be released from captivity--that's what the Jew wanted, but he wanted to be freed from exile and restored to his native land.

It seems to me that precious truth belongs to us and to our age--we, too, are held in captivity--we, too, are held in bondage, and we may not know it. We may not call sin, sin. And we may not be made aware of the fact of sin, but we see the results of sin. Round about us on every side there is an uneasiness of life. For anyone who begins to think seri-

ously, one becomes aware of the tension that there is in life and even within his own soul. None of us is wholly an integrated personality. The good that I would do, that I do not---the sins, even if I call them sins, that I would not commit, I go on committing. We need someone to set us free. We need someone to give us room in which to move about--to free us from the captivity and the bondage of these things that serve as fetters.

Kierkegaard puts it very, very well when he talks about the duck that dropped from the heavens and came into the farmer's barnyard, and there he stayed. And as weeks went by, he did not fly--he stayed there and he became fat; and then, next spring, when he went to fly away, he found that he could lift himself only with difficulty, and he did not soar away; and the next season he didn't even attempt to flap his wings.

That could be a picture of man--fettered by the bondage of sin--and it's only as Jesus Christ comes into his life that he's made aware of the fact that he's far from being a free man. Let me tell you again and again, Jesus Christ came into the world for this purpose--to be to men a Saviour--and that's why the church sets aside the four weeks before Christmas....as a time when man can do his Christmas thinking early.. ...with the searching of his soul....that when Jesus Christ comes, he should not miss him.

Now before the sermon comes to a close, may I accent (?) the question for you....."and from what is it that He does save us?....If He comes as one to redeem me, from what will He save me?...." Let me tell you at the very beginning, this Jesus Christ who comes as God into the world is one who can save us from ignorance! We don't know what God is like. Jesus says, "I will come into the world....and I will give them an unforgettable picture of the face, of the heart, of God....I'll show them what God is like."

Men cannot love when they are ignorant. Men cannot serve God when they do not know His nature, His character and His will. Men cannot behave as the sons of God until they first know that He is their Father. Men cannot respond to the highest and the best until they first see it. Jesus Christ says, "I will come into the world and I will free them from their ignorance....I will give them the knowledge of God's love and the beauty and the glory of His face."

He who comes as God will save me from my prejudices. I, who run my course disliking certain things only because I choose to dislike them---and I cannot give you a valid reason why I should.

"I do not like you, Dr. Fell;
The reason why, I cannot tell;
But this I know, and know full well,
I do not like you....Dr. Fell.

It's a pathetic thing in the life of a Christian to find people again and again who are imprisoned by their prejudices. Some whole new world is waiting to be conquered--some new venture waiting to be launched....they will not take the first step to it--they hide behind their own prejudice and pre-conceived notion--they cannot free themselves from it. No man can free himself from prejudice--it's only the Spirit of Christ that can do it!

Last evening, in a most interesting discussion of Martin Luther King's book, "Stride Toward Freedom," the Reading and Discussion Fellowship heard one of the members say, "I used to think that if I read and read and became more knowledgeable about certain things and certain people, I myself would become a better person." This may help, but it is never enough---all the knowledge that one may get about a thing or a person may stand helplessly in front of some basic, deep-seated prejudice.

And I tell you this morning, that Jesus Christ came to the world to save us from our prejudice. Only Christ can set a man free. Maybe the

prayer that some of us ought to make may not be for more knowledge--may not be for more information....but primarily for the Spirit of Christ by which to meet this thing--whatever it may be.

It is Jesus Christ who frees me from ignorance....it is Jesus Christ who frees me from prejudice....it is Jesus Christ who takes away my sin!....frees me from my guilt! Now, only God can do that. Go back again to all the things that man can do, there remains always one thing that man cannot do--man cannot free himself from his sins....only God can do it!

Who was the chap who stumbled into the Magdalene Church in Paris, and in the midst of the Mass, he heard the magnificant liturgy of the church and the priest coming to that part...."Agnus Dei, qui peccata tollis mundi"...."Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world"... ..and he said, "This is it!...This is it!...Only God could do it...only God!"

Are you held in bondage, my friend? Is your soul captive to the pressures and tensions of this world? Are you a victim of prejudice and ignorance? Then pray for Jesus Christ to come into your heart--to come into your life. Our God will come!....and when He comes, He comes for that purpose and that purpose alone. Salvation is God's specialty. Don't be satisfied with anything less.

The following is a transcription from the tape recording of a sermon preached by Pastor Raymond Shaheen in Saint Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church on the last Sunday after Pentecost, November 22, 1959. No corrections in grammer, style or thought have been made in the sermon once it was recorded.

THE GOD WHO COMES, SAVES

The sermon entitled, "The God Who Comes, Saves," is based upon the Old Testament lesson for the day. The text is a portion of the 4th verse of the 35th chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah:

"Your God will come and save you."

I think I know fairly well what this text must have meant to them. I am not nearly as certain of what this text could and should mean to you.

This is what it meant to them. They had lived for many decades in captivity--Jews in exile in Babylon--they had known one restraining influence after another, but they kept reminding themselves that they were God's people. They were the chosen ones, and that, of all the people on the face of the earth, God had a destiny in mind for them. While there were those who defected and went to other religions and turned their back upon the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, there were always the faithful who kept saying...."God will not forget us....God will come again, and when He comes, He will redeem us and He will restore us...He will take us all the way back to the land that we love....We cannot sing His praise in a strange land--and because He has made us to sing His praise, He'll take us back....He'll guide us on the way...He will allow us to enter again into the Holy City of Jerusalem....He will re-build for us our temple, and what is more, He will punish our persecutors and oppressors..."

This is what that text meant to them...."God will loom upon our horizon again and when He comes, you may be very certain about it, He will stretch forth His long and good hand and He will stretch it forth to save us--He will be our deliverer.." That's what that text meant to them.

I'm not so sure that it should mean the same thing in the very same way to us. For Isaiah, as he continued to write his great prophetic utterances, switched over

to that magnificant thought that one day, for all people, God would come, and when God would come for all people, He would also come in the role of the Redeemer and a restorer; and that one day would come when Jesus Christ would be born in Bethlehem.

It's this event that we're about to celebrate in about four or five weeks. This is the last Sunday in the church year--next Sunday will begin the new chapter in the church year; and the first four weeks are set aside as Advent, meaning a time in which we prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Now we, too, shall say to ourselves...."He is coming....He will come again--and when He comes....." -- can we now say He will come to redeem us? ....can we now say He will come to save us from our sins?....It's a question, you see. And that's why I said to you at the very beginning of this sermon--I'm fairly certain of what this text meant to them, but I'm not at all sure that I know what it means to you, for we are a people who are not given to talking much about sin. We are a people who are not given much to talking about God redeeming us from our guilt--and saving us. We are a proud people....we are a capable people.....man is far from being impotent.

Look what we've done--look what we've done in our generation and in the generation preceding us. From where we are right now--think of it!--we are less than 36 hours away, by air, from the farthermost point of the globe. Man can take his wings and he can fly. Man, through wireless and telegraphy, can girdle the earth with his voice in a few moments of time. He can soar into outer space....in your day and mine--think of it!--there is a very great likelihood that he shall plant his feet upon the moon!

With his fingers the skilled surgeon can bring back a dying soul to life again--with a little bit of manipulation--with a little bit of massaging--the heart can be restored....so it has been for some people.

We are, if you may remember a quotation from this desk not too long ago, the best-fed, the best-clad and the most economically-secure group of Christians since

the dawn of the Christian church. We have so much.....and when man has so much, what need has he for God? I know what this text meant to them--they were in bondage and in captivity--they longed for someone to set them free--they were denied so much; but I'm not so sure that I know what this text does and should mean to you and to me.

As an example, here we are. What was in your mind ere you crossed the threshold of this holy place? Did you say to yourself, with fond and fervent anticipation, as you drew nearer and nearer to the altar in this holy place...."I shall go there this morning, and above all else, whatever I may hear or say or have shared with me, there shall come to me the blessed assurance--the declaration of Grace:...."The Almighty God grant unto you, being penitent, pardon and remission of all your sins, time for amendment of life and the Grace and Comfort of the Holy Spirit...." Was this uppermost in your mind as you looked forward to coming to church today?....that here you could be given the assurance that God forgives you your sin?

Did you say to yourself when you came...."God willing, something may happen in that hour this morning by which I shall have motivation and I shall receive a dynamic by which to know I shall sin less than I sinned yesterday." How much was sin, and the revelation of the fact of sin, in your mind ere you came to this place this morning? And I tell you, with all the earnest candor of my heart, nothing that happens here on a Sunday morning is as important as the recognition of the truth again and again that God loves us....that God sent Jesus Christ into the world to forgive me my sins, and having been cleansed from my sins, to restore me to the family of man and to walk and live as a redeemed creature.

The people, when they think about sin and talk about salvation, they think about people who go around like this, you see--the tallow-faced, and the fingers tip-to-tip--and the pious sort--who talk about heaven. Heaven? A little boy, in the poet's jingle, said,

"I do not like the Sabbath,
The soap-suds and the starch,
The troops of solemn people
Who to salvation march."

It wasn't at all a pleasant prospect for him. And if a man is inclined to think about salvation and heaven, it's something in the distant future that can wait. And why? Because the present moment, for a good many people, is all too attractive. We who have so much here--what can heaven offer? The wit was perfectly right who took his friend to task when he visited him in his very handsome quarters, amid his magnificant estate...."Why, this makes tough competition for heaven!"

There are so many that are so earth-bound that heaven has no meaning whatsoever. Talk about salvation--talk about escape from hell----escape from hell to what? And if a man should think seriously about heaven and salvation, it may be not because he wants the joy of heaven, but because he wants to be saved from the tortures of the damned!

I am not at all sure that you and I can appreciate the meaning of this text. That's precisely why this sermon is being preached--for the simple reason that God will come and God will come into your life...God will stand right at the very door of your heart. He will come to us and when He comes, He will come in the role of the Redeemer.

When Jesus Christ came to earth, that's the only reason why He came....not to be another preacher....not to be another teacher....not to be another prophet..... not to be another great leader of men--the world has had those aplenty. Matthew puts it succinctly...."His name shall be called Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." That's why Jesus came into the world--to be the saviour of men from their sins.

Reinhold Niebuhr has taken us all to task when he said...."The matter of salvation from sin isn't incredible to our generation--it's simply irrelevant." For too many people it has no meaning at all. Should that make the coming of Jesus a fact that we ought not to consider? Is it such a hopeless thing that He should have come then, if men cannot relate it to their life and their need and their age? Ah! It makes it all the more necessary. For it is Jesus Christ who stands at the door of our heart, and as He stands there, it is only in His Presence that we become aware

of the fact of sin in our lives. Peter was perfectly right when, confronted by Jesus Christ, he said what he said, and the only thing that he could say...."Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ... and Peter never talked that way until he was confronted by Jesus Christ!

May I remind you this morning, that for the Jew in exile, the word salvation meant 'getting room in which to move about.' That's what salvation meant for him, and as you read that word again and again in the Arabic, you get that same connotation.... 'freedom in which to move'. To be released from captivity--that's what the Jew wanted, but he wanted to be freed from exile and restored to his native land.

It seems to me that precious truth belongs to us and to our age--we, too, are held in captivity--we, too, are held in bondage, and we may not know it. We may not call sin, sin. And we may not be made aware of the fact of sin, but we see the results of sin. Round about us on every side there is an uneasiness of life. For anyone who begins to think seriously, one becomes aware of the tension that there is in life and even within his own soul. None of us is wholy an integrated personality. The good that I would do, that I do not---the sins, even if I call them sins, that I would not commit, I go on committing. We need someone to set us free. We need someone to give us room in which to move about--to free us from the captivity and the bondage of these things that serve as fetters.

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four weeks before Christmas....as a time when man can do his Christmas thinking early.. with the searching of his soul....that when Jesus Christ comes, he should not miss him.

Now before the sermon comes to a close, may I accent the question for you..... "and from what is it that He does save us? .... If He comes as one to redeem me, from what will He save me?....." Let me tell you at the very beginning, this Jesus Christ who comes as God into the world is one who can save us from ignorance! We don't know what God is like. Jesus says, "I will come into the world....and I will give them an unforgettable picture of the face, of the heart, of God....I'll show them what God is like."

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Last evening, in a most interesting discussion of Martin Luther King's book, "Stride Toward Freedom," the Reading and Discussion Fellowship heard one of the members say, "I used to think that if I read and read and became more knowledgeable about certain things and certain people, I myself would become a better person." This may help, but it is never enough--all the knowledge that one may get about a thing or a person may stand helplessly in front of some basic, deep-seated prejudice.

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It is Jesus Christ who frees me from ignorance....it is Jesus Christ who frees me from prejudice....it is Jesus Christ who takes away my sin!....frees me from my guilt! Now, only God can do that. Go back again to all the things that man can do, there remains always one thing that man cannot do--man cannot free himself from his sins....only God can do it!

Who was the chap who stumbled into the Magdalene Church in Paris, and in the midst of the Mass, he heard the magnificant liturgy of the church and the priest coming to that part....."Agnus Dei, qui peccata tollis mundi"....."Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world".....and he said, "This is it!....This is it!.... Only God could do it....only God!"

Are you held in bondage, my friend? Is your soul captive to the pressures and tensions of this world? Are you a victim of prejudice and ignorance? Then pray for Jesus Christ to come into your heart--to come into your life. Our God will come!.. and when He comes, He comes for that purpose and that purpose alone. Salvation is God's specialty. Don't be satisfied with anything less.

THE GOD WHO FORGETS

During these Sunday mornings at Advent, the sermons will be based upon the Old Testament lessons, and Sunday by Sunday our endeavor will be to bring into clearer and sharper forus the face of God, and especially as revealed to us in Jesus Christ. It has been said that Jesus Christ came to this earth to show what God is like, or rather, to show who God is.

The sermon this morning is entitled, "The God Who Forgets," and the text is from the Old Testament lesson for the day, the 31st chapter of the prophecy of Jeremiah, and a portion of the 34th verse:

> "for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

People ought to ask important questions, and once they've asked important questions, then they ought to decide as best they can which of the important questions they've asked is most important. Occasionally, men ask questions like this one, "Is there a God?" There are courses on college campuses designed to answer that question. There are chapters in books--yes, there are books themselves that become an attempt to answer the question. "Is there a God?" Some men try to go from place to place gathering whatever audience they can find---trying to parade before men their own learning and to establish in the minds of some people that there isn't a God. It's a very important question..."Is there a God?"

But far more important than that question is this: "What is God like?" For if a man establishes in his own mind, without question, that there is a God....that somewhere out there, there is someone supernaturally great and powerful, who has influence upon the created worldll..like the Africander who said, ""e have yet to know what His name is, but we

know He is out there"....ah, this is the important thing---what is He like?...He who is out there...."What is the nature of God?...."hat is God like?

You know, don't you, that to answer that question we have Christmas. To answer that question, God saw fit to part the gates of heaven and said...."Jesus, you go....Give them a memorable answer." To answer that question, God allows the history of mankind to run its course until one day there should be Someone who would say, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father....he who has seen me, can know now what God is like."

It's an interesting study to see how, in the Old Testament itself, from chapter to chapter and book to book and generation to generation, God increasingly gives self-revelation. There was a time when people believed that God was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There was a people on the face of the earth who believed that God existed, but God existed for them and for them alone. And so, as the pages of the Old Testament are turned, you see the rising, the ascendancy, from a God of a tribe to a God who belongs to everyone.

Now, what is God like? If I should believe as some people do, that God delights in punishing people....if I should believe as some people do, that God is unkind and God is cruel and God is forever angry....if I should believe as some people do, that God is nothing but sheer Justice, seated upon His throne in heaven above--and seated only for one purpose--to decree punishment against people....I should believe that God is like that? I have a way of becoming like the gods I worship. Man's belief determines his behavior. Man's creed fashions his conduct. That's why it's as important, perhaps, as any question that you and I should raise..."What is God like?" The Bible attempts to answer that question, and Jesus Christ comes as 'Exhibit A'....the perfect answer!

Here in the Old Testament lesson for the day, we get a picture of God as one who forgets. One who forgets? Is He absent-minded? Are there some things that He will choose to remember and some things He will not remember? What do you mean when you say 'the God who forgets?' From this passage of Scripture, it is made quite plain. He is a God who forgets the fact that I am guilty!

In days gone by, people were prone to think of God, seated behind His desk--He is the Great Judge....and the Great Recorder, if you please! Upon His desk is the book--the book of life and the record of all souls. Your name and my name appear. Perhaps our name appears on two pages, or perhaps our name appears on one page with two columns...on one column, all the good that we have done....under the other column, all the evil that we have done....and God goes on, day by day, keeping His record. He who is omniscient--He who is omnipresent....is the Great Recorder.

And there are those who believe that as He keeps the record, then some day we appear before Him and He simply refers to the record. Nothing that I might say makes any difference. My life has been lived...my course has been run....what I have written, I have written....what I have lived, I have lived....and then God will take the record--He examines it--and then He'll enter His sentence accordingly. Now there are those who believe this about God. But could you love a God like that? Could you really serve a God like that?--who simply is a keeper of the record and passes judgement simply upon what He has seen?----

Once upon a time He was known exactly that way. He was the God of the Old Covenant--He was the God of the Old Testament in the early years---who made a bargain with people---who said to Moses...."You tell the children of Israel, 'If you will do this, I will do this!...If they will not do this, I will not do that....My behavior will be determined by their behav-

ior....I can do only as much for them as they will allow me to do.... This agreement--this covenant--determines my decision, according to their behavior." Could you love a God like that? Could you serve a God like that?

While it might appear just, this is where it falls down---you and I are weak, frail human beings. None of us, as long as we live, could ever live well enough to supply a record whereby the profit side of the ledger would outweigh the debit. None of us could ever give God enough good in our lives that would allow Him to say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant--what you have done....what you have done ....determines what you now receive--the crown of life."

You see, this happens to be the case. God not only looks at what the record is, but He also looks at why that record has been written. There is some good that's done because people want to make an impression upon other people--not because they want to glorify God. There is some evil that some of us never do--not because we want to be good--but we don't want to live a life of shame in the face of other people. There is some evil that we do not do, not because we do not want to displease God, but we do not want the displeasure of other folk. If they only only knew. There are some things that we keep bottled up inside our hearts and our souls and we go on thinking them, but, by some great stroke of furtune, we never do them. But my soul is evil, and God knows this. And this is a view-point of life sometimes called the total depravity of human nature, and it is not popular in some places, and it may not be popular with you. But I tell you by the authority of the Grace of God resting upon this one man's soul, none of us can ever be good enough to say to Jesus Christ..."You must open the door---my record is clean."

Now, if God should be the God who keeps the record....if God should be the God who remembers all of my sins and all of my sinning... ..and God should say to me, "You cannot enter--the record does not allow it,"....I could not worship a God like that. I could not love a God like that. It so happens that we haven't a God like that. We have a God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have a God who wants to be loved. We have a God who is love. We have a God who, in spite of our sins, loves us just the same. So Jeremiah says..."Let me give you this new dimension in God....let me add to you now a distinctive quality in the very nature of God, that you might come to know it and to appreciate it....He is the God who forgets!....a God who, when He reads the record, will read, and a certain something, once He has read it, He will remember no more."

Now, what is it that this God forgets? He is not absent-minded. He is never less than a God of Justice. But all the time He is a God of Justice, He is also a God of Mercy. And this God who forgets is a God who does <u>not</u> forget me. He does remember me. He'll always remember me. I am His child. He will not say to me, "I do not know you."---He <u>does</u>!

Well, if He doesn't forget me, what is it that He will forget? Well let me tell you something else He won't forget. He will not forget my sins. He knows everything, and He knows my sins. Well, if He doesn't forget my sins, and if He doesn't forget me, what is it that He does forget? He does not remember my guilt. He sees me as a sinner, but He will not constantly charge against me my guilt.

Ah, this is tremendous, I tell you! This lies behind the whole thinking with that magnificent parable that came from the lips of Jesus Christ....."Once upon a time there was a man who had two sons. The one son turned his back upon his father and claimed from his father the

things that he said belonged to him. And he went out into the world. And he lived the life of a fool. He wasted his substance and his own life in riotous living. But one day he had a change of heart, and he longed for his father and for his father's house. And he came back...." And you remember how the father went and put his arms around him and hugged him and kissed him and claimed him.

But you make a mistake, my friend, if when you think that when that man came back, the father forgot the kind of life that his son must have lived in the far country---this is not true. How could a man forget what had happened to his son, when the very appearance of his son was changed----this was no pretty picture. This was a disease-ridden young man who came back, old now, with the years, so the years had made him old. This was a man who came back who had had something terrible happen to him--because sin had possessed him. He was the devil's disciple. This was not a pleasant thing, when the father claimed the wayward son. It was far from being attractive, and think you for a single minute that when that father looked upon that son, that he did not see--he could not remember?....that in the far country there might have been a woman or women who had been violated?....that there was an inn-keeper who had been defrauded?....that there were boys who had been led astray? Do you think for a single minute that he would not know that?....that he could not see these things?

When that son came back, remembering all these things that must have happened, the father claims him, and he says, "I will forget your guilt....You are a sinner, and you have broken my heart, but I will not charge this guilt against you." This is the way God deals with us. He is the God who forgets. But the God who must remember my sin and God who must remember that I myself may have to pay the terrible price for

my sin, is the God who says...."If they are to be redeemed---if they are to be claimed---if they are to be won....how can I go remembering day by day their guilt? I will forget it....and I will restore them into the Family of God." This is the God who forgets....who remembers my sin and that I am a sinner, but who says, "I will forget his guilt."

It makes for good practicality, my friend. It has far more common sense than you may realize. What kind of relationship could I have with anyone if, having forgiven, I could not forget the guilt? It's far more theology than people may admit when the man, upon his death-bed,, says to his enemies...."I forgive you. In this condition in which I find myself, I am prone to deal with you mercifully. But if I become well, it's all off!" What kind of rapport could any man have with anybody else---what hope, what faith, what confidence could we have in each other?

God deals with us that way...."Some things I cannot forget, but one thing I will---I will forget your guilt." This makes me, of all people, the most grateful to God. Now let me tell you this--you'd never know this--if we couldn't keep Christmas. That's why Jesus Christ came into the world....to pay the price....to take away that guilt.

"Ps - God keeps no records. He needs only to examine the heart, and in it there can be room for both sin and Jesus Christ."

Thoughts on the Sermon

NOTATIONS ON THE SERMON "THE GRATEFUL HEART" TEXT GIVING THANKS ALWAYS AND FOR EVERYTHING TO GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. Ephesians 5:30

Of all the national holidays, Thanksgiving Day enjoys the distinction of its very own. There are other holidays either proclaimed by our Federal or State Governments which are set aisde to give recognition to what men have done and our debt of gratitude to them and to their memory. So we remember our debt to Washington --- Lincoln --- Veterans Day --- Memorial or "Remembrance" Day.

Thanksgiving Day, however, is a day officially set aside for the giving of thanks not to a man nor to a people but to Almighty God.

While it is the setting aside of the day to which we can point with our finger - in this case as the fourth Thursday in November - we dare not believe, as Franklin Clark Fry has so well observed, that tearing Wednesday, November 25, as a page from the calendar, will automatically bring you to Thursday, November 26, as Thanksgiving Day.

Thanksgiving Day to be truly kept should be set aside simply as a reminder that every day should be cause for gratitude. Therefore this sermon is entitled "The Grateful Heart". It is the person who can be so described who is constantly thankful. You know how we describe some people as soneone of a sad heart - or a glad heart - and by this descriptive we mean that regardless of condition or circumstance they are habitually sad or glad.

The text serves us in good stead and answers the three questions for us: when should we give thanks, for what and to whom.

Putting it quite simply, we are to give thanks always and thus become people of the grateful heart. This should not be difficult because in a certain sense each of us is a beggar at the

hand of God for upon sober reflection we admit that we are maintained by a bounty which is not of man's making.

We should give thanks for all things. Now this may be difficult to accept, especially when we recall how we have been pressured by pain, poverty, failure, adversity. One would think that when Paul wrote this text that he was riding upon the crest of the wave. Let us picture him also who might have had an unusually good night's sleep, shares a most pleasant meal with good friends and in the face of a gracious and optimistic mood thank God for everything. This, however, is not true. He was in prison with liberties having been taken away from him when these words were written. However, from the vantage point of a completely dedicated soul to Christ, he gives a backward look to his life and thanks God for everything since all that happened to him became an occasion by which to better know the mind of God for his service. Until we are of the mind of Paul we may not be able to thank God for everything. He reminds us, however, that it is possible to do so, even in his eloquent "For I know that all things work together for good ....."

Paul says we are to thank God the Father through Jesus Christ. It is the pathetic state of the atheist who, looking upon some good fortune, hasn't anyone to thank!

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we know the great provider and we are entitled to call him by name. Let us realize this carefully and thus take to task all those who from juke box religion refer to Him generally as "the man upstairs" or as "he" or "somebody up there likes me". God is not just somebody -- as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who came from heaven to die for us, who wants us to know Him intimately and personally,

we should call him by His rightful name. That is why the grace of Gratitude becomes us, for can it not be said that gratitude is the most direct route to the heart of God? Aside from the earnest plea for pardon, we are never nearer to God than when we are thanking Him. We are never farther away than when we are unmindful or unthankful.

Among the exceedingly good things awaiting us in the coming months in Saint Luke Church is the prospect that one of the rooms under our roof will be furnished as a chapel; a very intimate room for prayer and meditation. It will serve as a permanent overflow section and we shall encourage our prople to use it for quiet meditation. It is being made possible to us from the overflowing heart of a parishioner. Preferring to remain anonymous, the gift in itself expresses her gratitude to God. It will be appropriately called "The Chapel of the Grateful Heart". Its windows, based upon scriptural passages from St. Luke (for instance the one for whom this church is named) will depict the theme of gratitude . They will be Bartimaeus, the blind man, who gave thanks for the sight that he received --- the grateful leper and Anna, the prophetess who prayed to God for having seen the face of Christ. Above the altar, beautifully inscribed, will be these words: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits". Thus even through this room we shall constantly remind ourselves and we should habitually become grateful. Our thought will be that whenever we turn to God and no matter how heavy the burden or how deep our need, we should turn to Him gratefully, if for no other reason than just because we have no one else to whom to turn!

Thanksgiving, November 26, 1959

Sermon December 6, 1959

"THE GOD WHO SHOULD BE FEARED"

Have you taken the series of sermons being preached in Saint Luke Church this Advent seriously enough to discover for yourself the very type of thing that is being attempted? It was the sermon the Sunday before Advent which was entitled, serving as an introduction to the series, "The God Who Comes, Saves." Last Sunday morning it was, "The God Who Forgets." Today, the sermon is entitled, "The God Who Is To Be Feared."

Now, if you've done any thinking at all, you can easily come to the recognition of the fact that this series of sermons is an attempt to bring into clearer and sharper focus for each of us the very nature and the very character of the God who comes to us. Advent is that time of the year when we emphasize specifically the coming of God--the great invasion by God on earth.

Someone has said that it is significant that men should raise important questions. So often we talk about things that have little value. And a man, I suppose, is known by the questions that he raises--that is, the important questions that he raises--and every now and then it is a healthy thing for him to sit down and say..."Now, of all the important questions that I ask, which could be more important than another?"

Any instructor in philosophy--philosophy, generally, or philosophy of religion--any instructor in theology, will tell you that it is not enough that a man should raise the question, "Is there a God?" But it's far more valuable and far more significant if he should raise the question, ""hat is God like?", for men have a way of becoming like the gods they worship. If a man makes for himself, money, a god, then he

becomes an avaricious, selfish kind of person. If a man will make for himself, ambition and prestige, a god, then he, himself, eventually becomes the kind of a person who pushes people aside, caring nothing at all for them whatsoever, only as they may serve his purpose, as he hungers after prestige and ambition. A man becomes like the god he worships. God knows that. And that's why God--this God of ours--saw fit to come to earth....and of all the reasons that you may be able to give why God came to earth, you may have to include this one--that He came that we might know exactly what He is like.

This is a poor analogy--of course it is--all analogies, when we try to ascribe some relationship to deity, become very poor....but what is the justification for the departure from our shores to the most extensive trip that any President of the United States of America has made--and especially as it touches the Middle East and a part of the Far East, if that should be possible--what is the justification?....so that one man, representing all of us, might be able to tell other people exactly what we are like....And what is it that we want in this world?

There will never be complete understanding among people until people get to know each other and until people can find out for themselves what other people are like. God felt that way about us...This lack of rapport between God and His people. God says..."They must know what I am like, and in order for them to know it, I, myself, will go to them." This is the great significance attached to Christmas---that God came to earth in Christ--that Christ may show us what God is like. Now, this is prefatory--this is background for all of these sermons being preached during Advent---an attempt on our part to focus our eyes clearly enough upon the God who comes that we might see Him as He is.

This morning's sermon is properly entitled, "The God Who Comes Is A God To Be Feared." Let me give you a bit of historical background for the text. The text is from the Old Testament lesson for the day. It's, interestingly enough, from the last chapter in the last book in the Old Testament. The prophet Malachi has said:

> "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun
> of righteousness arise with healing in his wings;"

The people of Israel had been held in bondage and captivity for a number of decades....and while they were in Babylon, they were longing and crying for the day when they could be re-established in their homeland. It was, by all odds, the thing they wanted most..."How can we sing our songs in a strange land?"....and they kept longing and praying that one day they should be re-established. God answered their prayer. The long, arduous journey through the desert was now over. They were re-established in the Holy City; and their temple had been re-built.

But Malachi discovered among the people that there was something lacking. Their dream had been realized, but still there was something that they wanted to know that they did not experience. Malachi, as a messenger of God--his very name means 'messenger'--Malachi came and said, "I'll tell you what it is. You are in the Holy City...and you do have a place that you can call your own, where you can worship God.... but this is what you don't know yet--you still haven't found God in your hearts....you are still waiting for the entry of God into your lives.... Now pray for that....pray that God will come to each of us--not simply that each of us should be brought to the Holy City--not simply that each of us should be brought to the temple where we can worship....but pray that once we are in the Holy City, and once we are in the holy place, that God will be found in our hearts!"

And after he had told them that, then he threw a bombshell right in their very midst. For this very same prophet who asked them to pray for a God who would come to them also says..."But who shall abide the day of His appearing?"--who shall be able to stand in His Presence? This is what we need--that God should come to us. But when He comes, will we be able to stand in His Presence?....will we be able to abide His appearing?

I deliver this sermon to you now, almost in the midst of the Advent season, with grave and great justification. For we, too, are longing for the coming of God. And we, too, know that Christmas means the coming of Christ....but I would ask you--we who want Him to come--do we ask ourselves the question..."When He comes, will we be able to stand before Him?....will we be able to abide His appearing?" You see, this is what we've done--we've made of Christmas a very sentimental thing. It can be done so easily. Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, as a babe in a manger--our hearts are easily touched by it. And we sing all kinds of songs about it and we paint all kinds of pictures about it and we write and sing all kinds of music about it. And sometimes, in and through all of these things, we forget a very important element---the babe before whom we bow in the manger throne, as all babes, appears a helpless thing. Who is afraid of a baby? There is no thunder in his voice...There could be the annoyance and the irritation that comes with whimpering. There is no fire in his eyes....only innocence and helplessness. We are not afraid. And Christmas comes for us--a kind of sentimental thing that may not make any great demand upon my soul.

But I am in duty bound to remind you--that while Christ came as a child, He did not stay as a child. This was the beginning. But the ending of the birth of Christ is the chapter of a sacrificial life. He

grew up to become a man--a Man who had a way of searching to the very depth of people's souls--a Man who could look them straight into the eye and see what was written on the inner fabric of their hearts--a Man in whose eyes there could be fire--a Man in whose voice there could be thunder--a Man whose hand, raised in benediction, could also reach for a whip and physically drive people from the temple area. This also is the Christ who comes, and this Christ is a Christ who is to be feared. And if we do not fear Him, we cannot receive His richest benediction.

Malachi, centuries before Christ, is perfectly right when he says: "But unto you who fear my name, the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings." For shame upon us! We fraternize too much with God. We've made God, and I hesitate to use these words in the dignity of this pulpit--we on occasion have made too much of a God a "buddy-buddy." This kind of thing, while it may have some value, of 'walking and talking with me,'--this kind of thing that may allow us to say..."the Man upstairs"---this does not belong in the real category of a Christian experience.

There is one thing that the Jew had that we ought never to forget---there was a kind of respectful distance between God and man in the Hebrew tradition--so much so that for generations they never so much as even mentioned His name....for He was that holy--high and lifted up--to be held in awe. And until we have a kind of respect for that which is holy, we can never receive its richest benediction. Perhaps we, in the Christian tradition, have made too much of the last chapter in God's life in Christ, and we've forgotten to emphasize the necessary prelude. Perhaps for some of us to get the greatest good from Christ--for some of us perhaps to get the greatest blessing from the New Testament--we should steep ourselves in the pages of the Old.

He is truly a God to be feared. But why don't we fear Him? Because we don't fully understand the meaning of light. We deal with light--it brings softness--it brings healing--it brings warmth. We forget there is also another facet to light--it has a way of exposing things. We have a way of categorizing and departmentalizing even the very nature of God, and we'll talk about Him as being "Light," but it's something soft and gentle and warm. But light can be rigid and severe and stern. We forget that the light of God is a light by which we are exposed!

We talk about the love of God, but we feel sometimes that that love of God is like a doting old grandfather who can't possibly stand to disappoint or annoy His beloved grandchildren---and who'll do almost anything in order to benefit from their favor. The love of God is never to be seen as a love like that! The love of God is a holy, righteous God. It has its stern and severe side--just because it happens to be love! If it should not have it, it could not be love in the highest and the finest and the best.

We aren't afraid of God because sometimes we aren't afraid of ourselves. And we aren't afraid of our sins. And I'll tell you why---because most of us have a way of believing that we aren't/big sinners; we're little sinners....not black lies; but white lies.

I've forgotten the name of the book--it was written by an English writer by the name of Muir--and he talks about his own soul. He was brought to the verge of a nervous breakdown. And he went away to a place--a retreat center--where, in his instance, he could stay, not just one portion of a day, not one day, but several days. And while he was there, he came face to face with himself as he came face to face with God. He became cleansed, and the refiner's fire did its work. And his

reaction was something like this..."We can talk about the great sinner, and the way God purges the soul of a great sinner, but," he said, "it dawned upon me, I who came to the verge of a nervous breakdown--I wasn't a big sinner! I spent all of my life dealing with little sins--the half-truths and white lies....and I thought they weren't important!...and I excused myself!"

Well, maybe that's the way it is with us. We are not big sinners, and so therefore we're not afraid of God. We are little sinners. I do not recommend it to you, and it's use perhaps ought to be used among us with discretion, but maybe the Roman church has something in holding before her people the crucifix. It is never the empty cross--it is always the cross with the Corpus--the body of Christ hanging before them....as a constant reminder that no sin is ever a little sin. For it could be in your case or in my case that the accumulation of little sins have brought us to the very brink of damnation.

I think there's another reason why we don't fear God---because when we think of Him in Judgement, we fail to think that when we are confronted by Him, we'll be confronted by the total personality of Christ--He who is perfect love and truth--and at some times the most severe kind of judgement may be, not so much having our sentences read to us from a book, but to having to look Him straight in the eye.

Let me read for you something that Studdert-Kennedy once wrote--that dynamic preacher--with the very keen insight that became him, he pictured a Cockney soldier having gone to chapel; and after church was over, he had a dream--and in his own way he records that dream for us. Something that I say to you right now, even before you hear it, that can speak to the condition of the soul of every one of us. This was Studdert-Kennedy's Cockney soldier's dream:

I seemed to stand alone, beside
A solemn kind of sea.
Its waves they got in my inside,
And touched my memory.
And day by day, and year by year,
My life came back to me.

.....And in this interlude, the Cockney soldier thinks of himself, the life that he had, the chances that he had to live it, the good he could have done and did not, the evil that he did that he shouldn't have done----all of this parades back and forth in front of him; and God has a way, in this great dream of bringing in front of him the people with whom he has had to do: and one of those people happens to be a woman, whose body and soul he violated.....

All eyes was in 'is eyes - - all eyes,
My wife's and a million more;
And once I thought as those two eyes
Were the eyes of the London whore.
And they was sad - - my Gawd 'ow sad,
Wi' tears that seemed to shine.
And quivering bright with the speech of light
They said, "'Er soul was mine!"

- - -

And then at last 'e said one word,
'E said just one word - - "Well?"
And then I said in a funny voice,
"Please, sir, can I go to Hell?"
And he stood there and looked at me
And 'e kind of seemed to grow,
Till He shone like the sun above my head
And then He answered "No,
You can't: that Hell is for the blind
And not for those who see.
You know that you have earned it, lad,
So you must follow me.
Follow me on by the paths of pain
Seeking what you have seen.
Until at last you can build the "Is"
With the bricks of the "Might Have Been.""

That's what 'e
That's what 'e said, as I'm alive,
And that there dream was true.
But what He meant - I don't quite know;
Though I know what I has to do.

I've got to follow what I've seen,
Till this old carcase dies:
For I daren't face in the land of grace
The sorrow of those eyes.
There ain't no throne, and there ain't no books,
It's Him you've got to see.
It's Him, just Him, that is Judge
Of blokes like you and me
And boys, I'd sooner frizzle up
In the flames of burning Hell
Than stand and look into his face
And hear his voice say - - "ELL?

(From "The Sorrows of God"--
a poem by Studdert-Kennedy)

Sermon December 13, 1959

THE GOD WHO COMFORTS

This is the next-to-the-last in the series of sermons being preached this Advent upon the general theme, "The God Who Comes." As you have paid some attention to these sermons, you have already noted the fact that any one of these sermons in itself cannot stand by itself. You will not find in any one of these sermons the whole truth of God.

Now that's quite understandable, because no one can ever see the whole truth at any one time...because of the limited vision of man and his inability to always adequately perceive. Truth has many facets--even the series of sermons with their titles...."The God Who Comes, Saves"....."The God Who Comes, Forgets"...."The God Who Comes Is To Be Feared"....and this morning.."The God Who Comes, Comforts!" Comfort? Fear? Salvation? Love? Sunday by Sunday, we've taken a glimpse of God in profile....only a portion of His face has come into view in these twenty minutes that we spend together at this time....and, I suppose, if you've gone away or if even while the sermon is being preached you've raised all kinds of questions, waiting for another answer as the sermon progresses or even as it came to a conclusion....that's perfectly proper--because truth has many sides to it.

It's important that this point should be made today because when you talk about a God who comforts, you are quickly saying to yourself....."Well, I can show you certain passages in the Bible where I don't see much of the soothing, comforting hand of God....I can quote for you certain passages from the Scripture where God is revealed as being very rigid and very austere....and there's not much of the calm in His voice....in fact there's a great deal of the thunder....and there's something of fire in His eyes....why, I can quote you page after page in the Bible where God's hand is not raised in benediction--but it's raised in judge-

ment." .....You are perfectly right, my friend. This, any one of us can do. And when you come to talk about a God who comforts, you must remember that this is but a facet of His total personality. This is but a partial view of God that we get because you bring clearly into focus, even in this immediate moment, the God who could be severe and very rigid in His dealings with the children of men.

This morning's sermon is based upon the Old Testament lesson. The text is the 1st verse of the 40th chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah:

> "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.
> Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

I don't suppose any one of us can really appreciate what this voice must have meant to the people of Israel in exile. It was, in reality, the first time that they had ever heard a messenger of God speak to them in this manner. For the most part, the prophets before Isaiah were men who spoke about doom and the coming judgement. They talk about God's way and God's righteousness, and they talk about the way God could hold all the nations in the hollow of His hand; and He would sit in judgement upon every one of them; and then, every now and then, you got a prophet who would say...."and you, Israel, when God comes to you--if you think He has been hard on these other people--you wait until you stand before Him, because in your case, judgement will be most severe....You've had an advantage....God's given you the Ten Commandments....God's given you patriarchs, prophet, priest and kings....God's kept coming to you with one kind of revelation after another....and you've played the part of the harlot--you have not been faithful." That's the way some of these prophets speak to the children of Israel...."God's going to point a finger at the whole

world....but when He comes to you, Israel, He'll shake it most vigorously."

And then one day, a handful of people in exile, there in Babylon, heard a man rise up and when he preached to them--that bewildered congregation--there was something of the light of Heaven in his eyes....there was a lilting quality to his voice. He said...."God wants to comfort you....God wants you to know that He loves you....God wants you to know that He cares so much for you that He, Himself, is going to guide you safely all the way back home!....Remember this--listen to it, will you!...and God has even told me, Isaiah, that I should shout it to you....that I should come to you, crying, that it should be heard....God loves you!.... God wants to comfort you!"

This is the wonderful picture of God that comes to us behind all the glorious message of Christmas. God, Himself, will come to us because He loves us and because He wants us to know that He loves us. What an impression this must have made upon them: for they were the people in exile, you know: who, when their captors would come to them, they would taunt them and they'd say...."You have a harp--why don't you sing for us?...why don't you make merry for us?" Let me read for you the exact Scriptural quotation as they themselves recorded it:

> "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

They were a people out of whose heart had gone a song; and it did not seem likely to return; and God took note of that; and God says..."I will put a song back in their hearts....and if it's the thing that they need most to know, that they shall sing again--let them know that I love

them, and I will comfort them."

I have always been grateful for the privilege and the opportunity that would come to me, to sit at the feet of older men; and especially if that older man could be a man of God--who had been a shepherd and bishop of souls. During my years in seminary, I had the good fortune to serve as a student assistant to a man whom I later, by the grace of God, was able to succeed; who had been in the ministry, at the time of his death, almost fifty years: who had spent his entire lifetime in one parish. He was a shepherd to every member of his flock.

I said to him one day...."If you had your life to live over, what would be the note that you would strike, repeatedly, in your sermons?.... ...What would be the thing uppermost in your mind as you dealt with people?".....I might have known his answer--it was so true to his personality...."I would do this," he said, "I would go always and everywhere, telling people that God loves them....that God cares for them....that God so loves them, that He came to them in Jesus Christ....I think it would be the measure of comfort that I would want every one of my sermons to be earmarked."

I have not forgotten what he told me. And I hope, by this time, that you know that I haven't forgotten it. And now, after two decades in the ministry, I have come to believe that what he recommends is most valid....for this could be the thing that men need most to know about God.

I'm not so sure that it becomes my prerogative to go through life shaking a finger vigorously at people and saying...."You're a sinner.... God's going to punish you!" I don't think it's my business to go through life and to tell people that they're going to go to hell--that their sins are going to find them out. With all my heart, I believe that life itself has a way of teaching these lessons. The devil has a way of making

his payments in full. The wages of sin are heavy--and of their own weight, they can crush a man. And that burdensome weight can speak for itself.

But I do believe that, under God, it is my sacred responsibility to tell people that they don't have to go to hell--that heaven is possible....and that God loves them....God forgives them....and God wants to comfort them. This is the wonderful message of Christmas--God so loves that He comes....that He might reveal to His children a face and a heart of love.

Haven't I told you before that I think I've been here long enough now, that if I were to leave this pulpit and walk down the aisle of this church--at almost every second or third pew I could look to the right or to the left and I could find any number of you in this place right now who are doing valiant duty in life, but the weight of sin is crushing. You may call it fear....you may call it failure....you may call it frustration---..you may call it anxiety over your past....you may call it anxiety over your future....you may call it a concern for your own life.....you may call it a concern for someone that you love....you may call it your own inability to cope with someone very dear to you, whose life is changing, and you're afraid of the change that's taking place--and you're weighted down with the fact that life will never again be the same for someone.

But you've come to church. By the Grace of God, this hour will be spent in vain if there cannot come to you some very definite assurance that God loves you....and that there can come an inter-calm and an inter-certitude by which you can combat the forces that come to you from all sides on the outside of your life. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people--thus says your God."

I am willing to believe that for some people the only peace and quiet and comfort that they get in the course of a given week could be the peace and quiet and comfort that they get right now and in this place, and through the impact of the total worship experience. When I remember the life of Jesus Christ, I say to myself...."Here is the life of one man who had to identify Himself with people--He could not keep Himself in Heaven--He had to come to earth--He had to be with us--He had to come to us because He loves us--He could not stand aside."

And when I read the record of His life in the New Testament, I say to myself...."Ahh, I am right--this is true!" Why did He go to the woman of Nain and perform a miracle?....for the simple reason that He could not stand aside from her and see her comfortless. Why did He die on Calvary's cruel cross?....because He could not separate Himself from us in our sin. We say what fools we had made of ourselves--and He could not take a detached attitude. He said...."I will go to them....I will live with them.....and when their sins find them out, I will offer them salvation....if I have to die on a cross to prove it to them, I will...."

If I were to capture one moment in the years of my ministry, and to say--in this one moment and in this one moment alone, I was made aware of the redeeming, comforting power of God's love, I'll tell you when it was....a woman had come--crushed with the burden of her sin....I did not have to tell her she was a sinner....everyone knew that. But in a great moment of her soul, she laid her soul bare to God--and cried out for pardon...."I want to be forgiven....I want to be forgiven.."...and as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, I could say to her..."Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten thee by water and the Holy Spirit, and forgiven thee all thy sins, now cleanses thee with His Grace." I have never seen anything like it. Not to share with

someone the rigid lines on God's face as a judge, but to share with someone the bleeding, loving heart of Jesus Christ.

I am sympathetic to any number of people that I meet who have been defrauded by their fellow-men. It is a terrible thing to meet someone who put faith in somebody else and found out that that person was rotton to the core, so it seemed....and I can understand why some of these friends say to me...."Pastor, isn't it true that some day they ~~are~~ will get their just dues?" Of course! Anyone who lives has a way of meeting payday. But this I must say to my friend, and any number of them who may talk to me like that....well, be careful! Don't you prayerfully ask God to sit in judgement upon him--don't you prayerfully ask God to deal out justice to him--without also remembering that that same God who deals out justice may deal out justice to you....and the thing that I want least at the hand of God is justice....because I know the sinner that I am. The thing that I want most is <u>mercy</u>, forgiveness,....and comfort.

Coventry Patmore has put something into the words of a poem that's entitled, "The Toys," which speaks eloquently on this very point. It's among the simplest and the most touching of all the poems which compare the relations of a human father to his son, with the relations of God to man, and how we can appreciate the fact that, above all else, God, who has all the reason in the world to become impatient with us, takes upon Himself the role of a Comforter....understands....and forgives. Let me read it for you:

> "My little son, who looked from thoughtful eyes
> And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise,
> Having my law the seventh time disobeyed,
> I struck him, and dismissed
> With hard words and unkissed, -
> - His mother, who was patient, being dead.
> Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,
> I visited his bed,
> But found him slumbering deep,
> With darkened eyelids, and their lashes yet

From his late sobbing vet.
And I, with moan,
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own;
For, on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters and a red-veined stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach,
And six or seven shells,
A bottle with bluebells,
And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art,
To comfort his sad heart.
So when that night I prayed
To God, I wept, and said:
Ah, when at last we lie with trancèd breath,
Not vexing Thee in death,
And Thou remembrest of what toys
We made our joys,
How weakly understood
Thy great commanded good,
Then, fatherly not less
Than I whom Thou has moulded from the clay,
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,
"I will be sorry for their childishness."

("The Toys" by Coventry Patmore)

This is the God who comes to us...The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ....."Comfort, comfort ye my people...thus saith your God."

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint."

THE UNRECOGNIZED GOD

This morning's sermon is the last in the Advent series on the general theme, "The God Who Comes." It is based upon a portion of Scripture which is found in the Gospel lesson for the day. Entitled "The Unrecognized God," the text is John, the Ist chapter and the 26th verse:

> "but there stands one among you whom you do not know;"

The Christmas story always makes an indelible mark upon the fabric of those who are young. We can remember perhaps when we were told the Christmas story; now maybe we can see faces; perchance we can hear voices; we can even sense the atmosphere of Christmas of another day; and if we think long enough and seriously enough, we can recall our own reaction as a child to the Christmas story.

There is something about Mary that I had to love. To think that God would choose her, out of all the women on the face of the earth, and that He would whisper in her ear...."You are the fairest of the fair....you are the purest of the pure....and I choose you!"

There is something about Joseph. How little we know about him. But this we must know--humble, devoted mate to Mary....if God would tell her something that he himself could not quite understand, he would not make light of it--he would always be to her the perfect mate.

Shepherds, wise men---why I used to think even, as a youngster, of the shepherd boys who must have said to their fathers..."Well, you go on your way--we'll tend the sheep as best we can while you're gone."

There is so much about Christmas that was wonderful and beautiful, as I recalled this story. But there is one thing, as a child's mind, that I could never understand---how was it possible that God

should visit this earth, and there should be no room for Him? I could not possibly understand how the innkeeper could have turned Him away. Isn't God--God? Wasn't there something in the face of Mary that should have compelled him to recognize that this one was different? As a child I couldn't possibly understand how God should come to earth, even in the form of a child, and that people could not recognize Him. As a child, I always believed that God would make Himself known--that people would have to respect Him and to love Him.

Alas and alack, the older I become, the more I understand now why it is that way. For God seems always to be the "Great Unrecognized." This is the tragedy of life: God so loved the world that He would give His only begotten Son, and when His Son would come, they would reject Him. This is the tragic thing in life itself: that God should seek to come to earth and leave heaven above, and when He came to earth, there would be no room. This is the tragic thing in life: that God should come and that men should let Him stand in their midst and they would not even so much as know who He was. This is the condemning thing in Scripture: "There stands one among you and you do not know Him"--"and yet," says John, "I tell you I am not even worthy----you pay tribute to me...you pay respect to me...you think I'm wonderful...", says John, "but I tell you I'm not even worthy to get down on my knees and to even untie the strings of His sandal."

Why is it that this could be? I think I have several answers to share with you. One is that even though God sees fit to come to earth, people will not see Him--people will not recognize Him--because there are some people who are not looking for Him. It could be as simple as all that. It is downright appalling to discover how many people there are on the face of this earth who go their way through life

never looking for God....who run their course forever horizontally--never concerning themselves with the vertical approach--never lifting their eyes beyond their own horizon.

Not too many months ago, there was a man who sat in my office who said to me, "What can I say to a man who says to me," and then he called him by name, "'You go to church...you make your prayers... you call yourself a religious man...you say you believe in God; I don't believe in God...I don't say any prayers to someone...I do not identify myself with people who call themselves religious....spiritual is the last word that I would give to myself; and I'm getting along very well! ...."what do you have that I don't have?'"

Not everyone will be as bold and as honest as that. There is the pressure of the Christian culture, you see, that will keep some people from speaking out that way. But here was a man who, unfortunately, may represent all too many people...who is running his course very easily and quite complacently. And God...God's the last thing that he'd think about! This could be true for many people. And that's why God may remain the Unrecognized One--because there aren't enough of them who are looking for Him.

There's another reason why He remains unrecognized: because, if we should be looking for Him, sometimes we don't look for Him the way He comes. We want God--yes--but we want God in our likeness....we want to design Him....we want to picture Him; and when we do, we picture Him in the way that we think things are important. When He actually came upon this earth, as a Christ-child, that was the last thing that some people ever thought would be the manner and the mode by which God would come. They needed someone to free them from the yoke of oppression.... they needed someone to drive the Romans into the sea....they wanted some-

one who would be their king....they wanted a dictator. And God didn't come that way. They might have believed that God would come, but when He came, they would not recognize Him, because they were not looking for Him in that way.

If God were to come again....Oh, why do I put it that way?.... Why should any man say, 'If God were to come again?'....this is the truth of truths---God is always coming....and what happened in Bethlehem, historically as it was, stands as the eternal symbol that God is always breaking into His world....God never takes a detached attitude toward you and to me....God is always invading....God is always coming....and Bethlehem stands as the eternal symbol. It did not happen just once and in one place.

When I went to Bethlehem, not too many years ago, and stood there in the Shepherds' Field in the silence of the night, underneath the silver of the canopied stars, I thought to myself...."What if everyone on the face of the earth had to come here to Bethlehem to find Jesus Christ?...."What if they would never have known that He had come unless they could come as the shepherds came and as the wise men came--to a certain place at a certain time?....Ah, what happened here two thousand years ago, happened as a constant reminder to us now that God is always breaking through--God is always coming to me!" And then I remembered the words of the poet:

"Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem were born;
If He's not born in thee, thy soul is still forlorn."

And as I, as a child, used to point my finger at the innkeeper and say, "For shame, for shame--Jesus Christ came to you and you didn't recognize Him!"....now I've become mature enough, at least in this sense of the word, to point my finger at myself and say, "But He's always com-

ing to you, in one way or another....and if you should reject Him.... if you should fail to recognize Him---He will not make your heart a Bethlehem."

I remember the words of another poet who said, as I used to sit in judgment upon those who would not recognize Him and who rejected Him:

"Ah, and if a sleeping babe now lay
Within a manger filled with hay,
And God's star pointed out the way,
Would I believe? Would I obey?

Had I heard the precious words
Would I have known,
This is the one we came to seek
And Him alone?"

The sermon serves as a warning. He is always coming. There is always a star that points toward Bethlehem. He could come--and He could still remain the unrecognized. And why? This is the answer, my friend---these other two statements that I have given you are simply prefatory--the answer of answers is this: He can remain the unrecognized one because He is to be seen only by those who ask the very Spirit of God to open their eyes that they should see...."Open my eyes, that I may see glimpses of truth Thou gavest me."

This should be the Christmas prayer that all of us should be making this year...."Oh God, open my eyes that I may see, lest when Thou dost come, I may not behold Thee as Thou art."